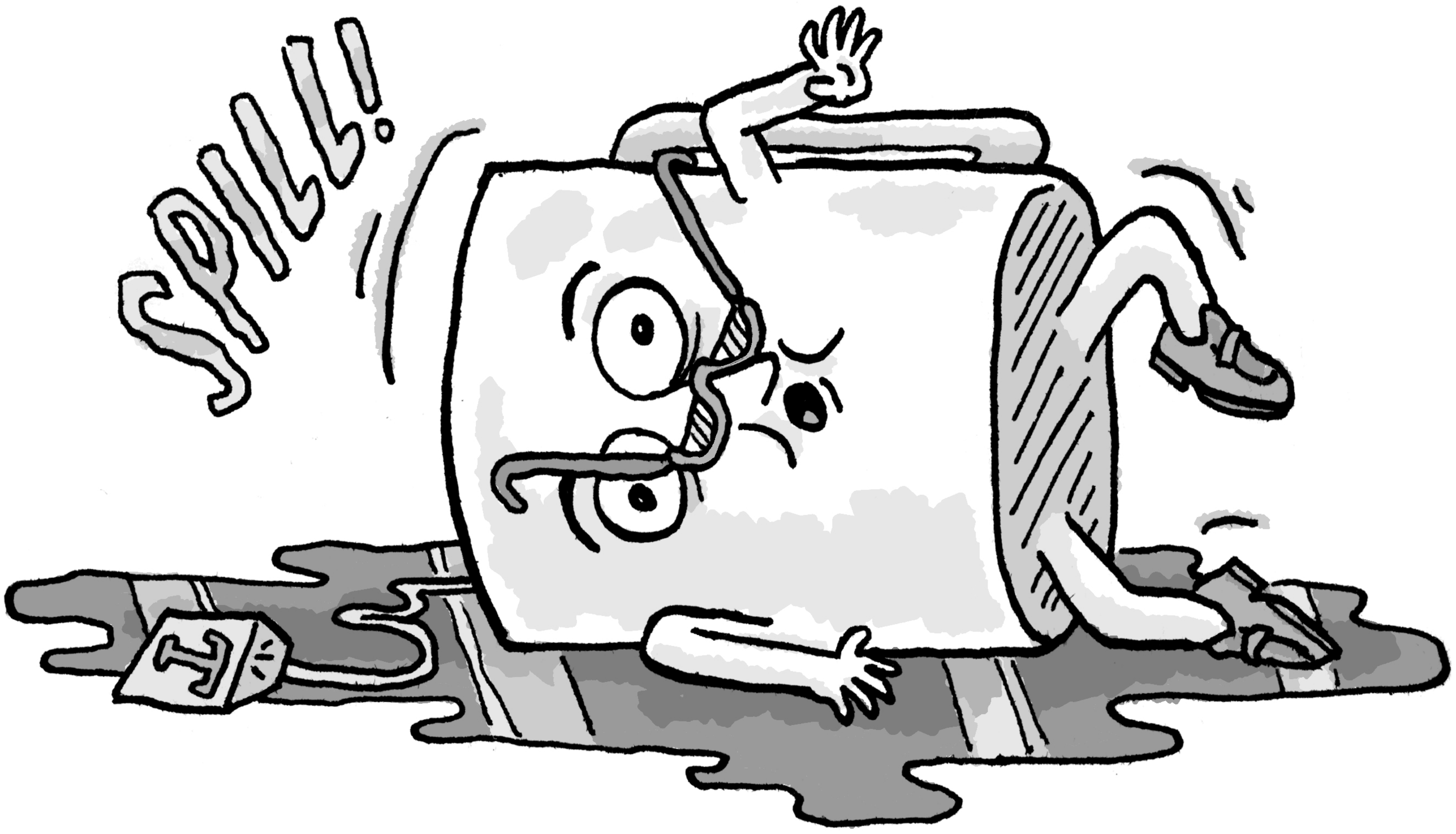
APPLE, ONION & ME

a very
long and
maybe boring
Comic about
my time on
Apple & ONION

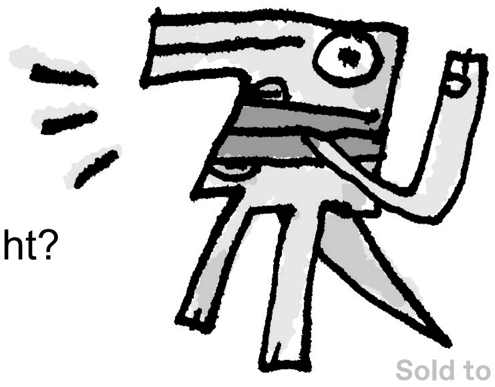
BY Sam Spina

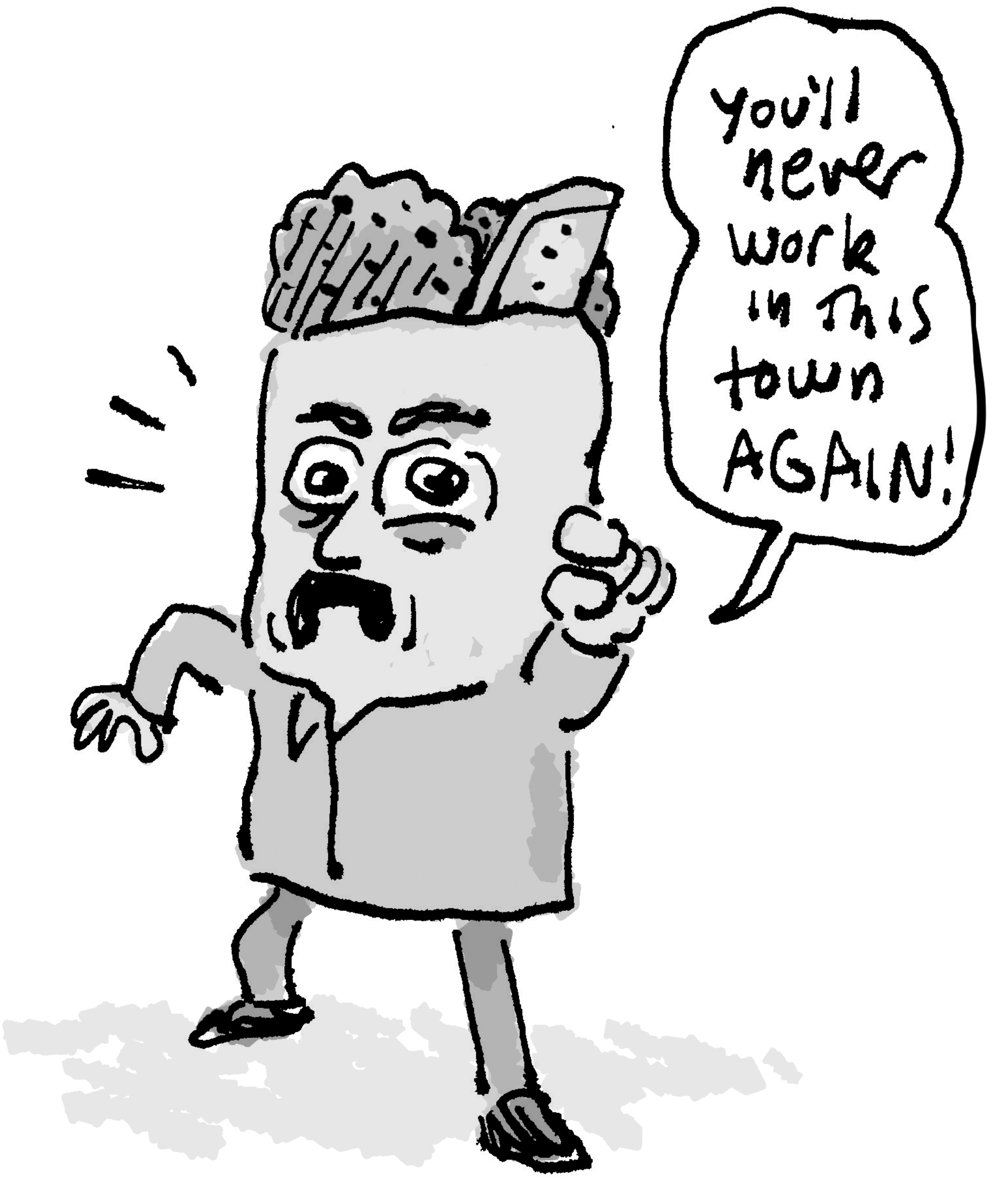
EVER WONDER WHAT IT'S LIKE TO WORK ON A CARTOON?!

well here's an EXTREMELY in-depth and HONEST look at my experience as a storyboard artist on Cartoon Network's APPLE & ONION



Dear digital reader,
This is the back cover of the print version.
I almost didn't include this, but why not, right?
Don't you want to see? Ok, see ya!
-Sam




you'll never work in This town AGAIN!

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This has NO affiliation with Cartoon Network at all.
This is MY STORY about MY LIFE. They don't own me.
I don't even work there anymore! But I would. Hire me :)

FIRST PRINTING of 200 COPIES — OCTOBER 2021
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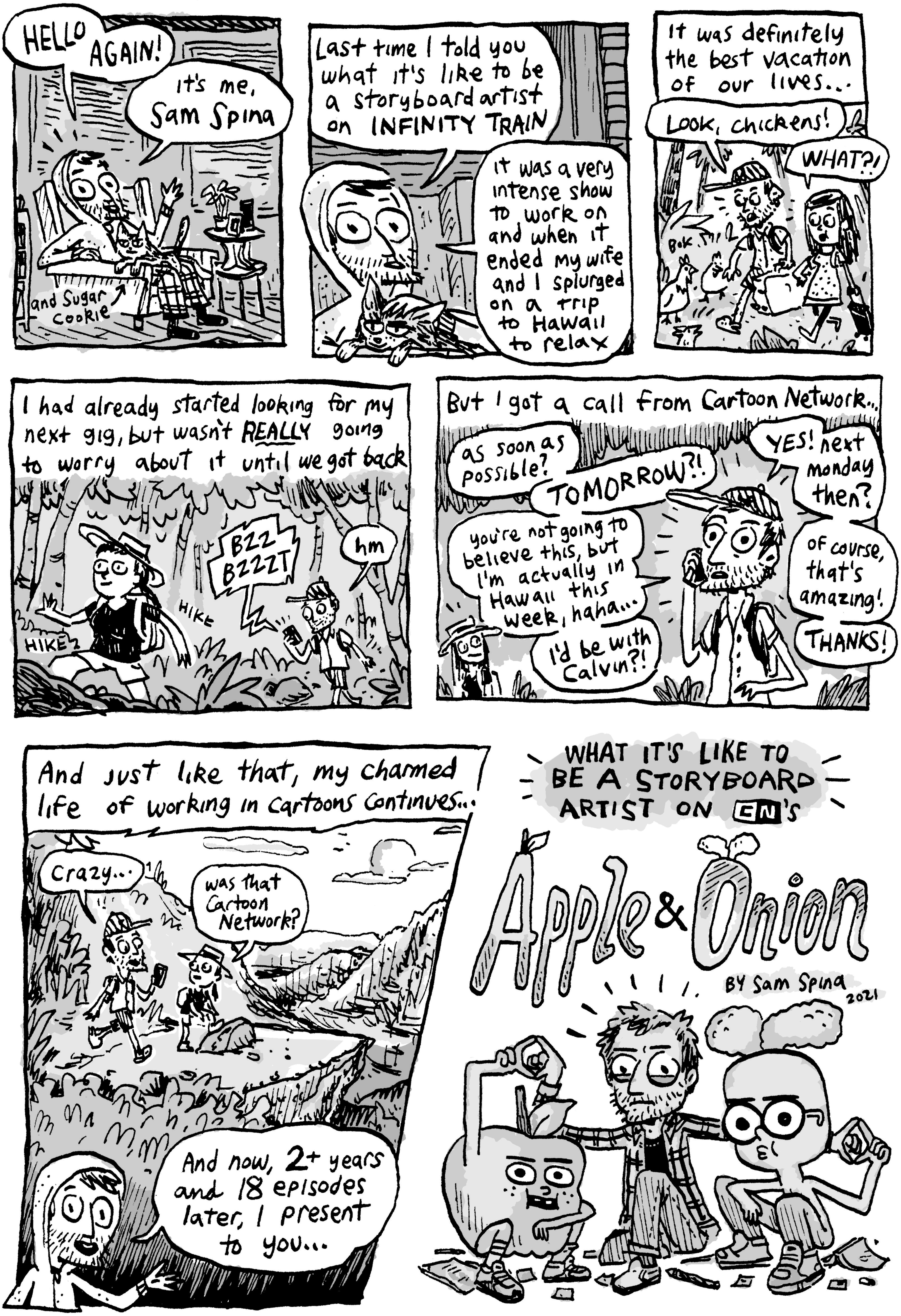
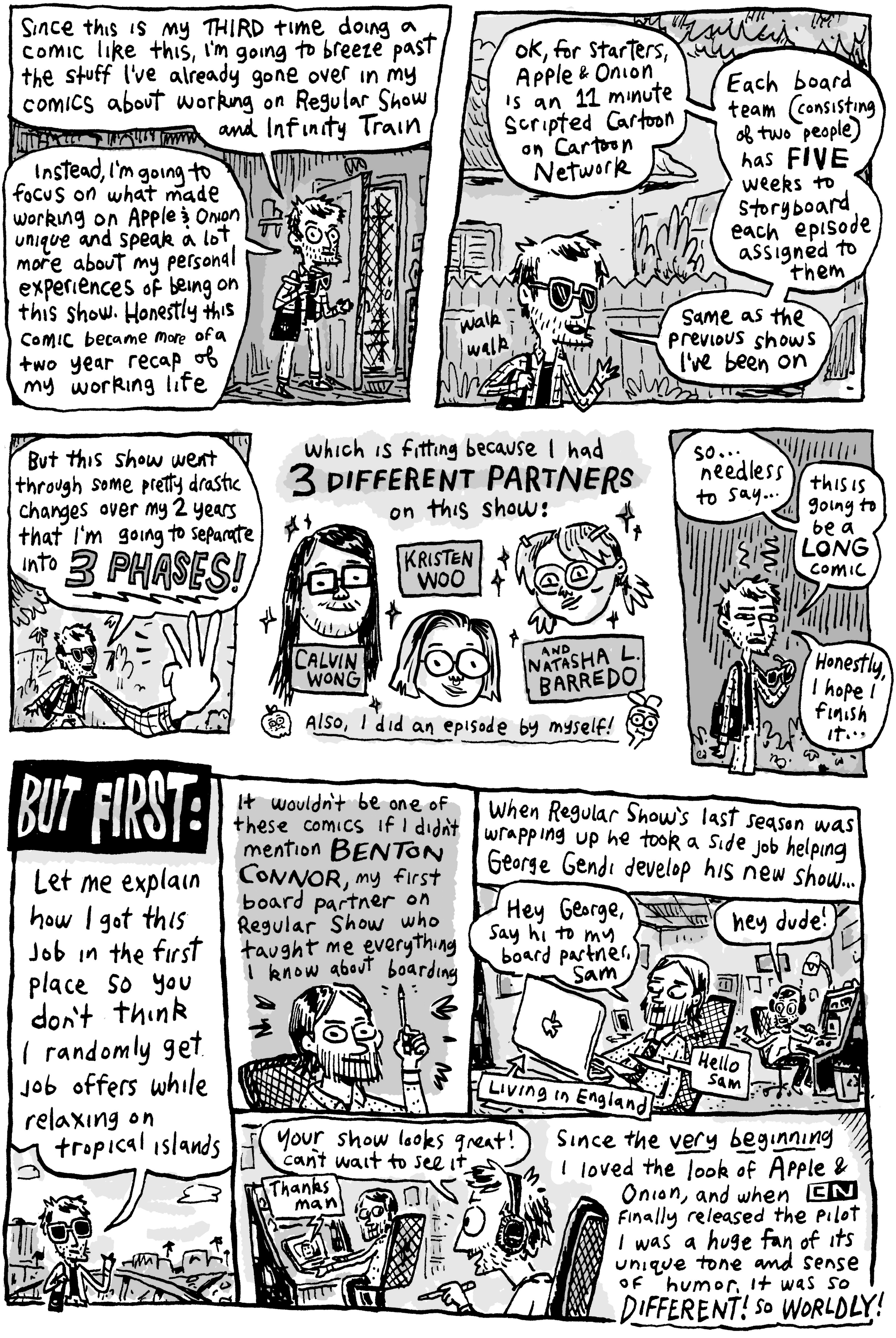
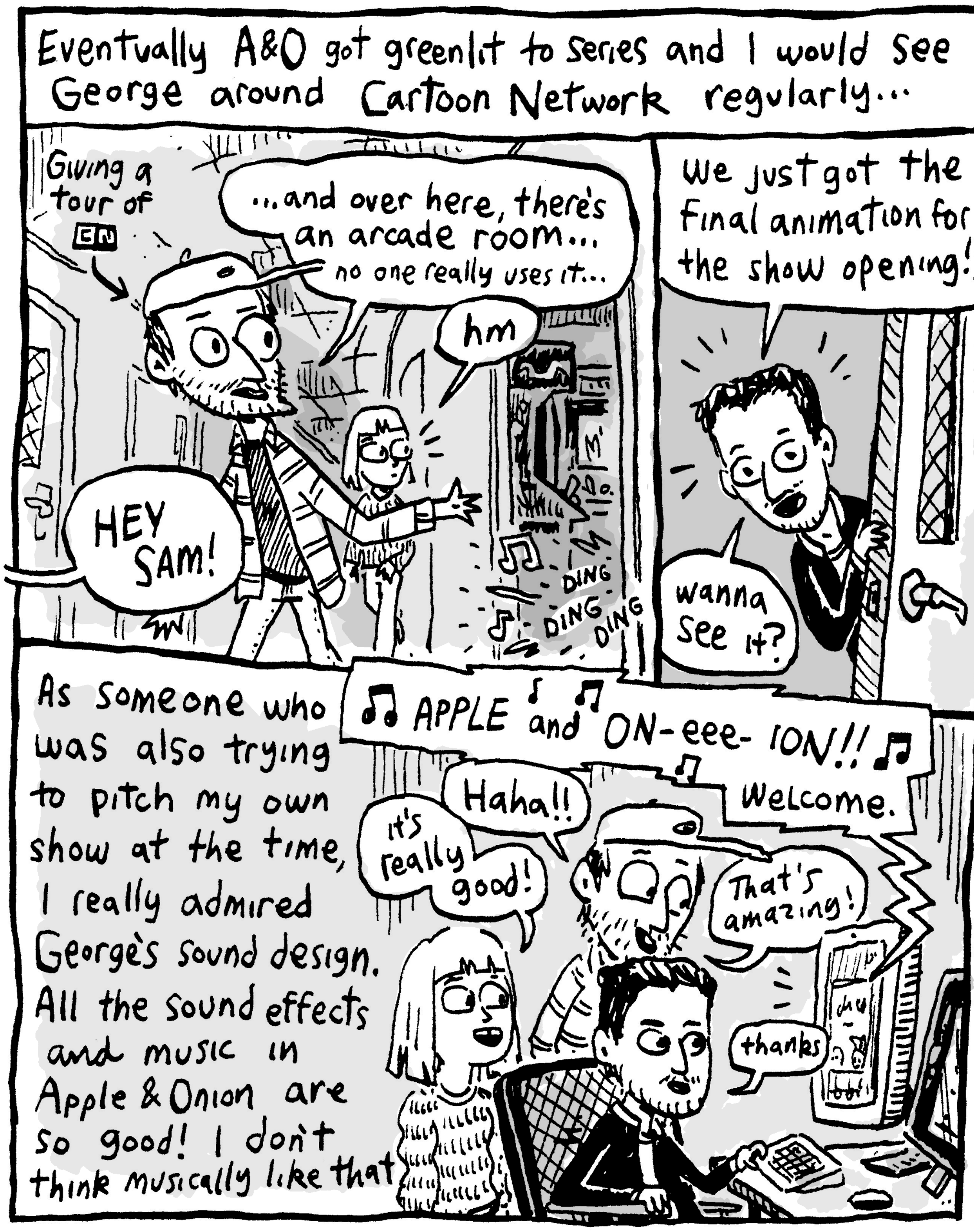

HELLO AGAIN!
it's me, Sam Spina
and Sugar Cookie
Last time I told you what it's like to be a storyboard artist on INFINITY TRAIN
it was a very intense show to work on and when it ended my wife and I splurged on a trip to Hawaii to relax
It was definitely the best vacation of our lives...
LOOK, chickens!
WHAT?!
BOK
I had already started looking for my next gig, but wasn't REALLY going to worry about it until we got back
BZZ BZZZT
hm
HIKE
HIKE
But I got a call from Cartoon Network...
as soon as possible?
TOMORROW?!
YES! next monday then?
you're not going to believe this, but I'm actually in Hawaii this week, haha...
I'd be with Calvin?!
of course, that's amazing!
THANKS!
And just like that, my charmed life of working in cartoons continues...
Crazy...
was that Cartoon Network?
And now, 2+ years and 18 episodes later, I present to you...
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A STORYBOARD ARTIST ON CN's
Apple & Onion
BY Sam Spina 2021

Sold to krvaldez1357@gmail.com


Since this is my THIRD time doing a comic like this, I'm going to breeze past the stuff I've already gone over in my comics about working on Regular Show and Infinity Train
Instead, I'm going to focus on what made working on Apple & Onion unique and speak a lot more about my personal experiences of being on this show. Honestly this comic became more of a two year recap of my working life
OK, for starters, Apple & Onion is an 11 minute scripted cartoon on Cartoon Network
Each board team (consisting of two people) has FIVE weeks to storyboard each episode assigned to them
walk walk
Same as the previous shows I've been on
But this show went through some pretty drastic changes over my 2 years that I'm going to separate into 3 PHASES!
Which is fitting because I had 3 DIFFERENT PARTNERS on this show:
CALVIN WONG
KRISTEN WOO
AND NATASHA L. BARREDO
Also, I did an episode by myself!
So... needless to say...
this is going to be a LONG comic
Honestly, I hope I finish it...
BUT FIRST:
Let me explain how I got this job in the first place so you don't think I randomly get job offers while relaxing on tropical islands
It wouldn't be one of these comics if I didn't mention BENTON CONNOR, my first board partner on Regular Show who taught me everything I know about boarding
When Regular Show's last season was wrapping up he took a side job helping George Gendi develop his new show...
Hey George, say hi to my board partner, Sam
hey dude!
Hello Sam
Living in England
Your show looks great! can't wait to see it
Thanks man
Since the very beginning I loved the look of Apple & Onion, and when CN finally released the pilot I was a huge fan of its unique tone and sense of humor. It was so DIFFERENT! So WORLDLY!

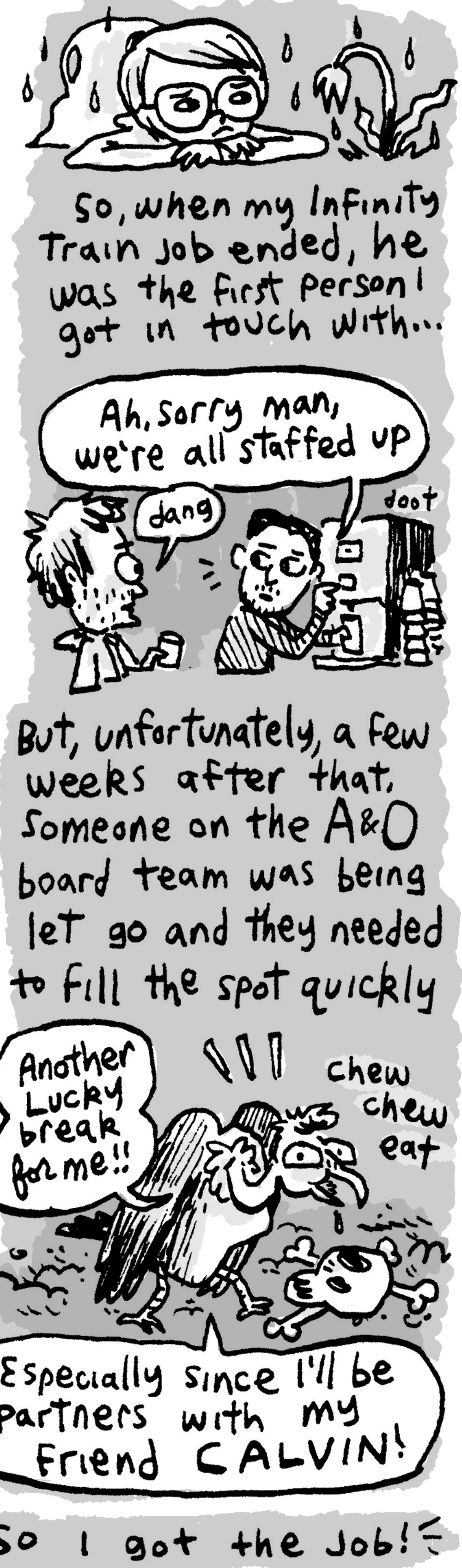


Eventually A&O got greenlit to series and I would see George around Cartoon Network regularly…

Giving a tour of CN
…and over here, there's an arcade room… no one really uses it…
hm
HEY SAM!
DING DING DING
We just got the Final animation for the show opening!!
wanna see it?

As someone who was also trying to pitch my own show at the time, I really admired George's sound design. All the sound effects and music in Apple & Onion are so good! I don't think musically like that

♫ APPLE and ON-eee- ION!! ♫
Haha!!
Welcome.
it's really good!
That's amazing!
thanks



So, when my Infinity Train job ended, he was the first person I got in touch with…

Ah, sorry man, we're all staffed up
dang
doot

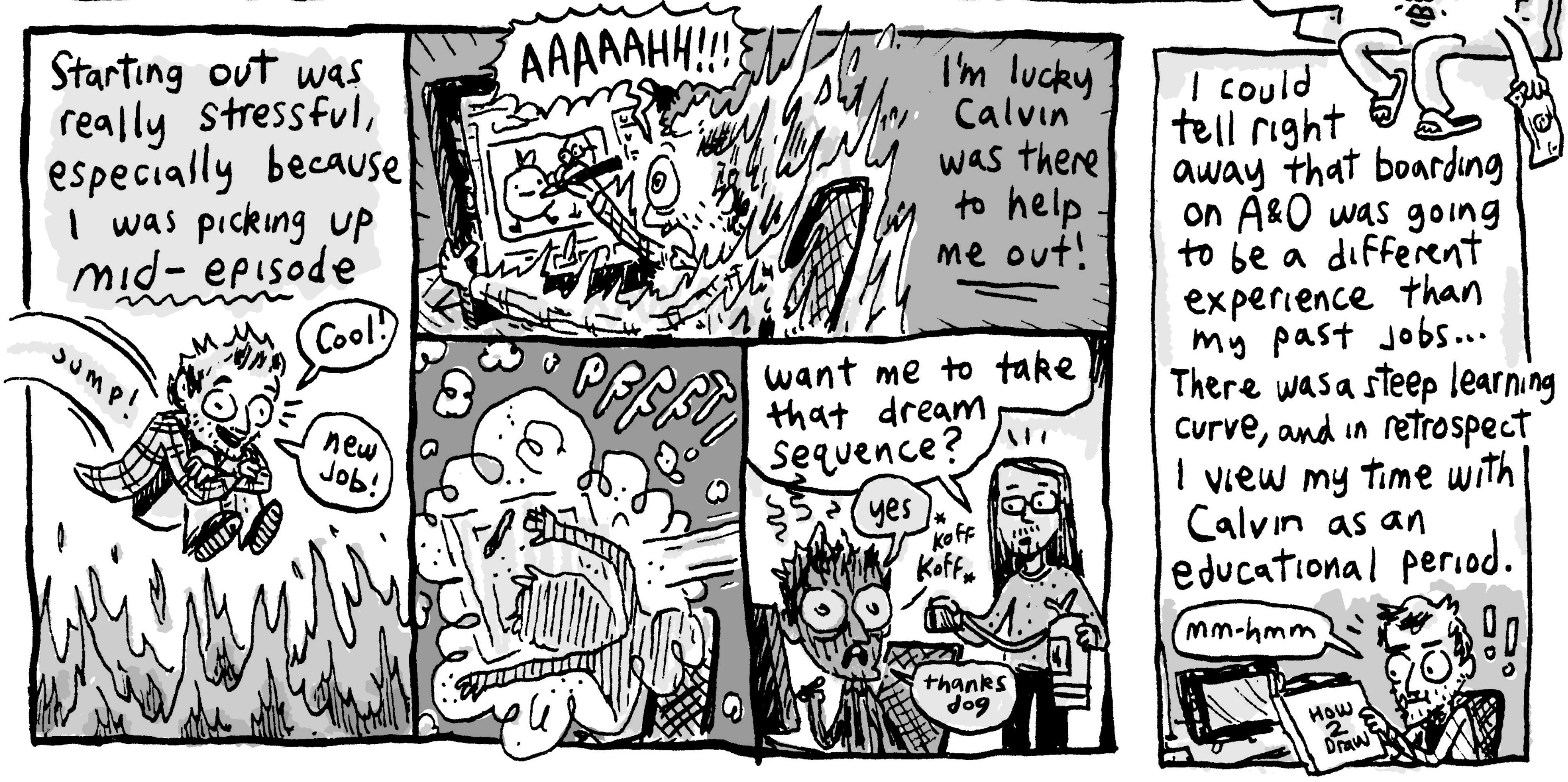
But, unfortunately, a few weeks after that, someone on the A&O board team was being let go and they needed to fill the spot quickly

Another Lucky break for me!!
chew chew eat
Especially since I'll be partners with my friend CALVIN!

So I got the job!

PHASE ONE:

FIVE EPISODES with CALVIN



Starting out was really stressful, especially because I was picking up mid-episode

JUMP!
Cool!
new Job!
AAAAAHH!!!

I'm lucky Calvin was there to help me out!

PFFFT!
want me to take that dream sequence?
yes
koff koff
thanks dog

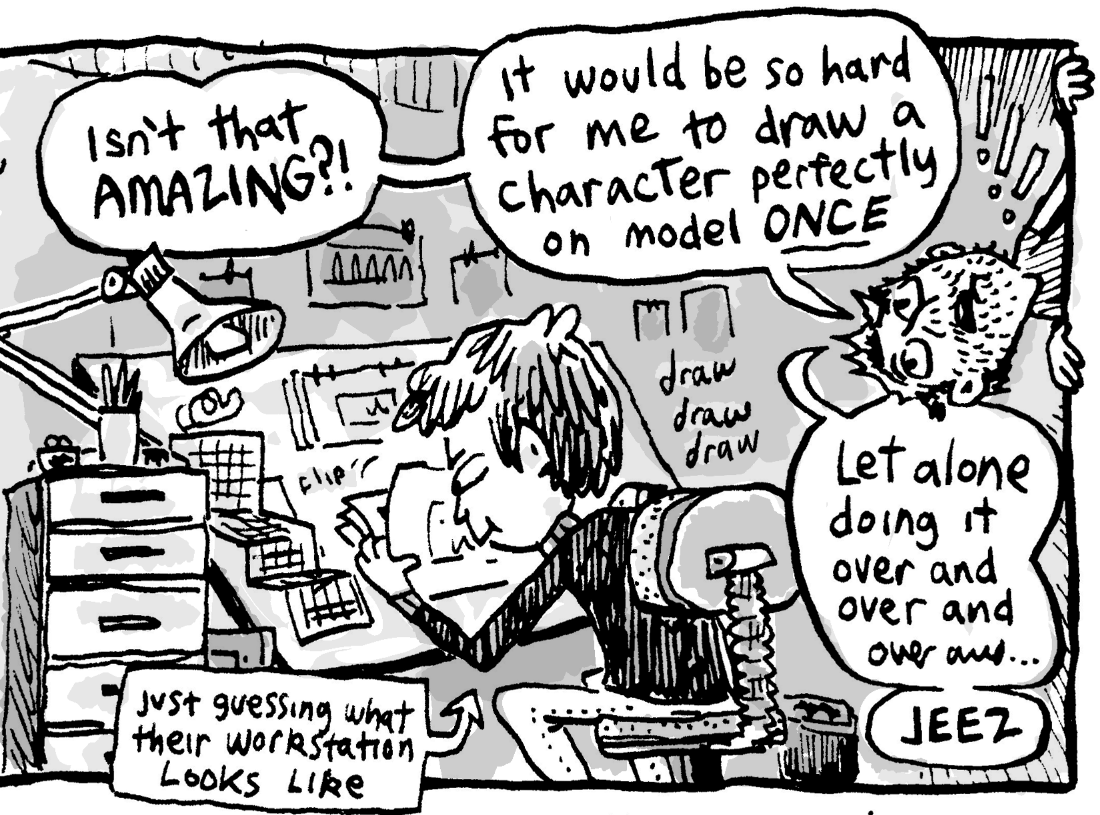
I could tell right away that boarding on A&O was going to be a different experience than my past jobs… There was a steep learning curve, and in retrospect I view my time with Calvin as an educational period.

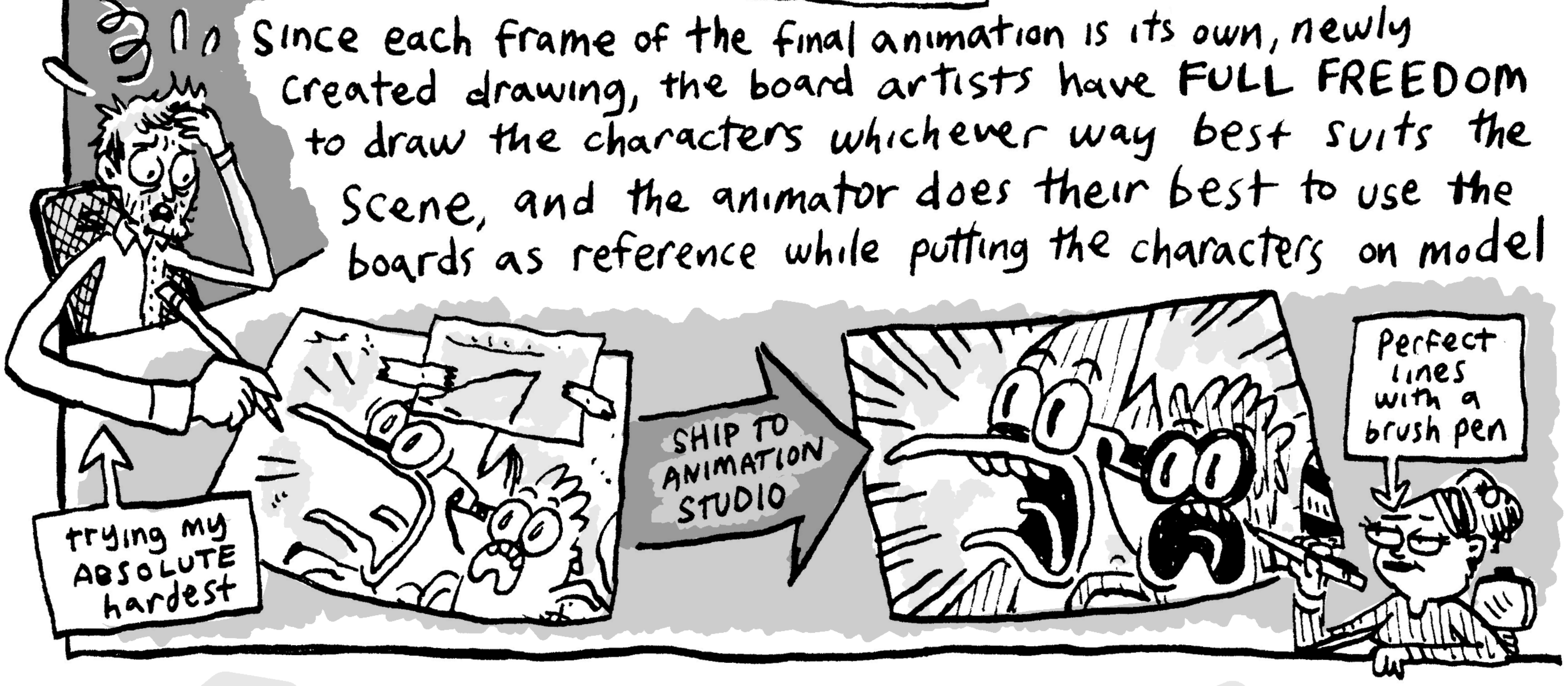
mm-hmm
How 2 Draw

Sold to krvaldez1357@gmail.com

FOR STARTERS, APPLE & ONION IS ANIMATED DIGITALLY! *

This is a huge departure from my last productions, all of which were **2-D ANIMATED**, meaning board artists could draw the characters in whatever pose and from whatever angle they see fit, as every frame of animation is drawn **BY HAND** by the animation studio

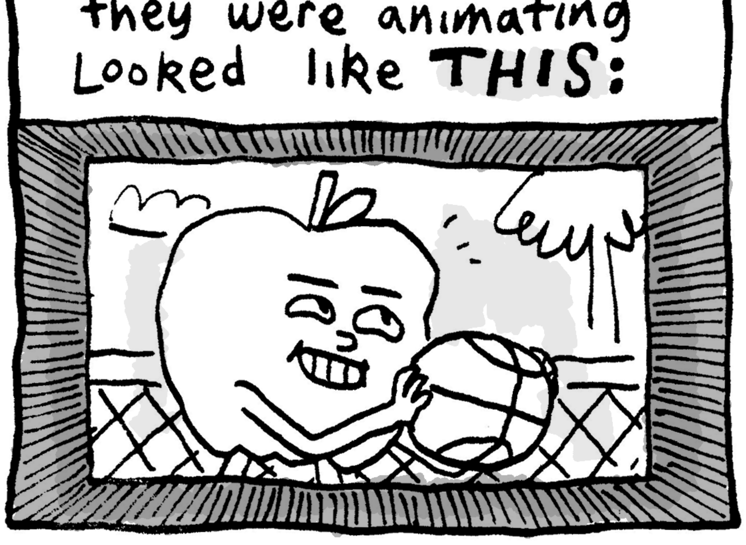

Isn't that AMAZING?!
It would be so hard for me to draw a character perfectly on model ONCE
Let alone doing it over and over and over and...
JEEZ
draw draw draw
flip
Just guessing what their workstation looks like


Since each frame of the final animation is its own, newly created drawing, the board artists have **FULL FREEDOM** to draw the characters whichever way best suits the scene, and the animator does their best to use the boards as reference while putting the characters on model

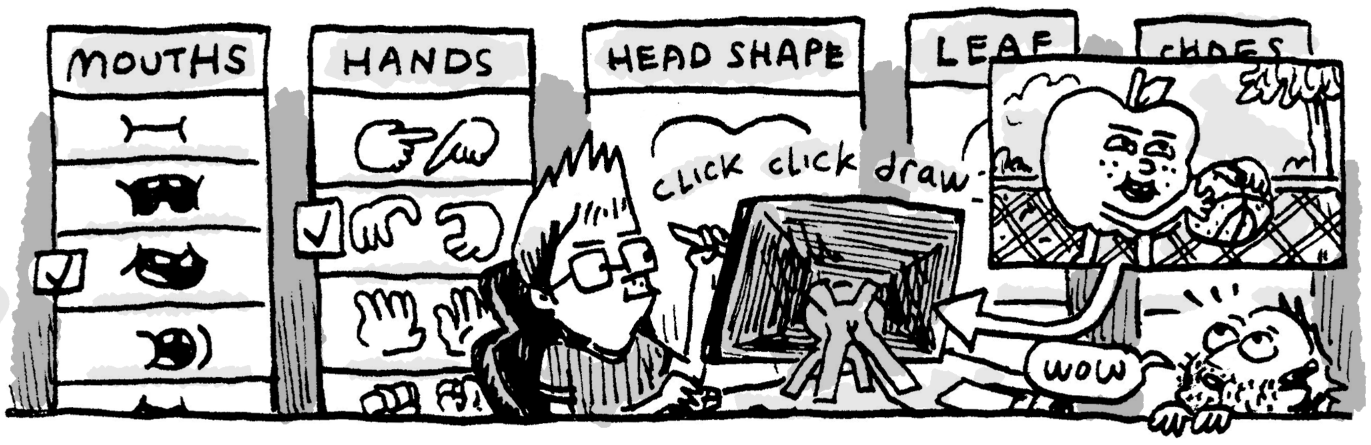
trying my ABSOLUTE hardest
SHIP TO ANIMATION STUDIO
Perfect lines with a brush pen

But a lot of shows nowadays are animated digitally, meaning the animators have a library of pre-made components for each character and arrange them frame by frame to make them look like they're moving!

So if the storyboard panel they were animating looked like **THIS:**



The animator would choose the right components from that character's library of assets and assemble them to match the storyboard


MOUTHS
HANDS
HEAD SHAPE
LEAF
SHOES
click click drag
WOW

DISCLAIMER: Hey, I'm not an animator. This is all just my limited understanding of how this stuff works, and how it affects my job as a board artist... and every production is DIFFERENT!! *

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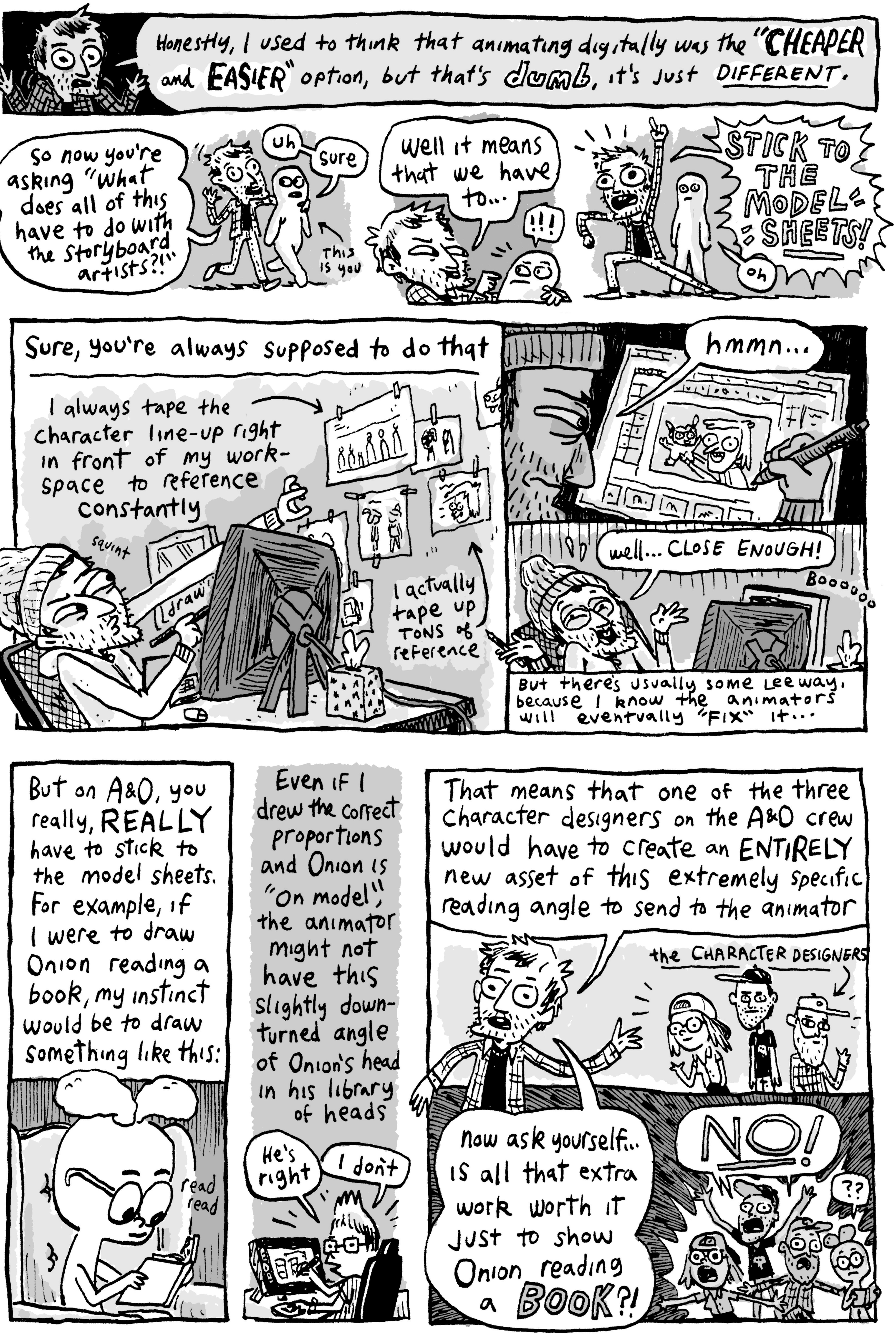
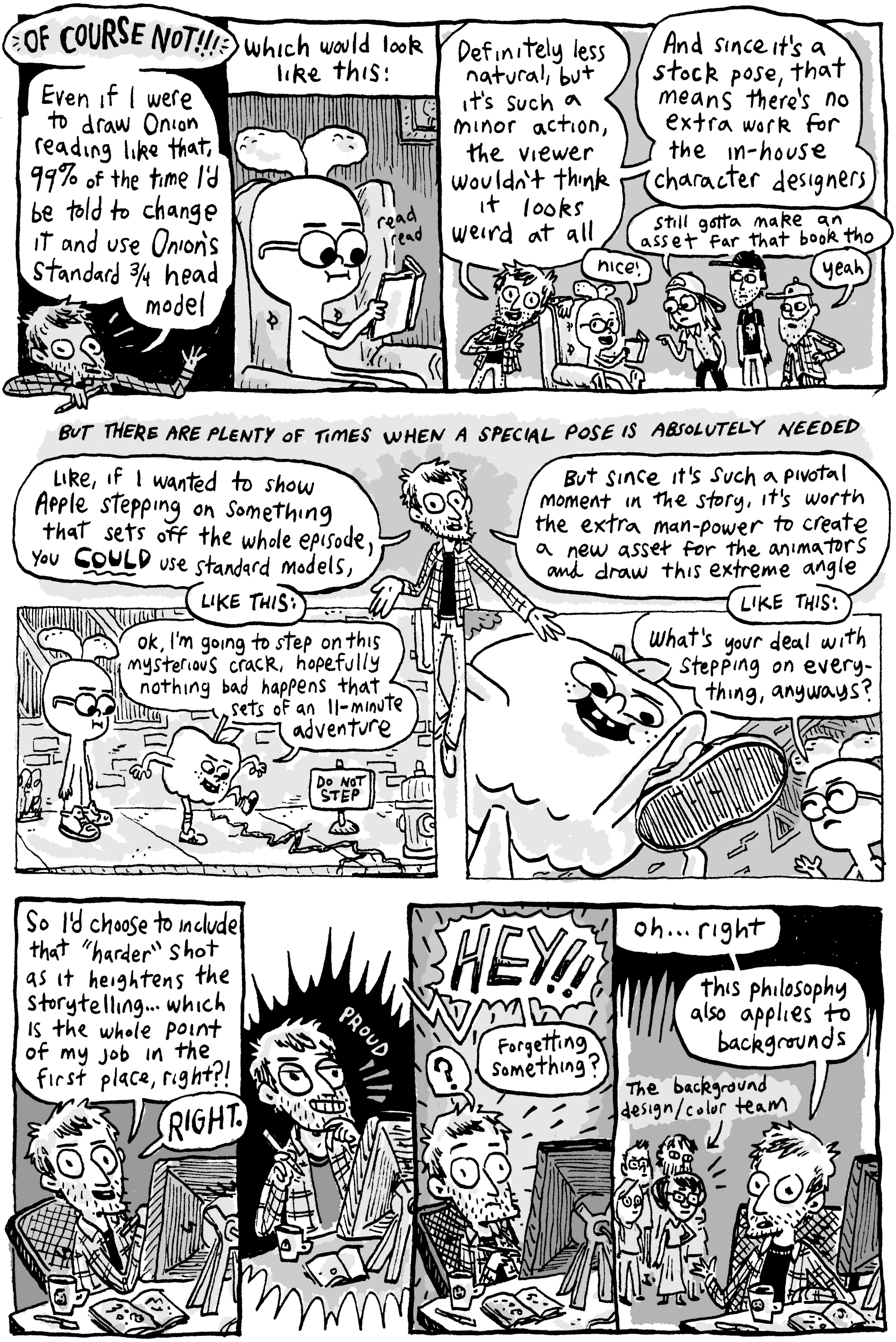
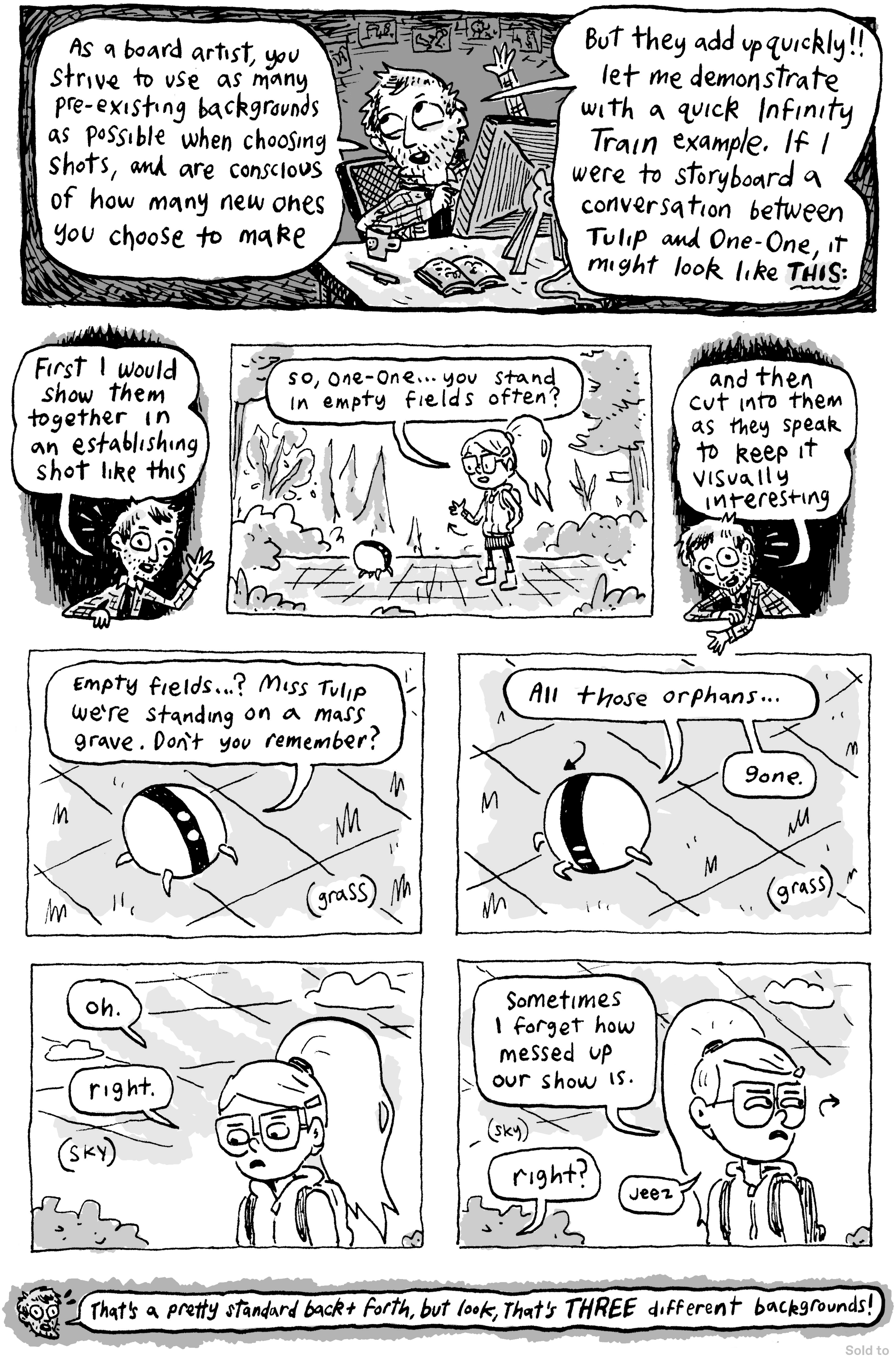
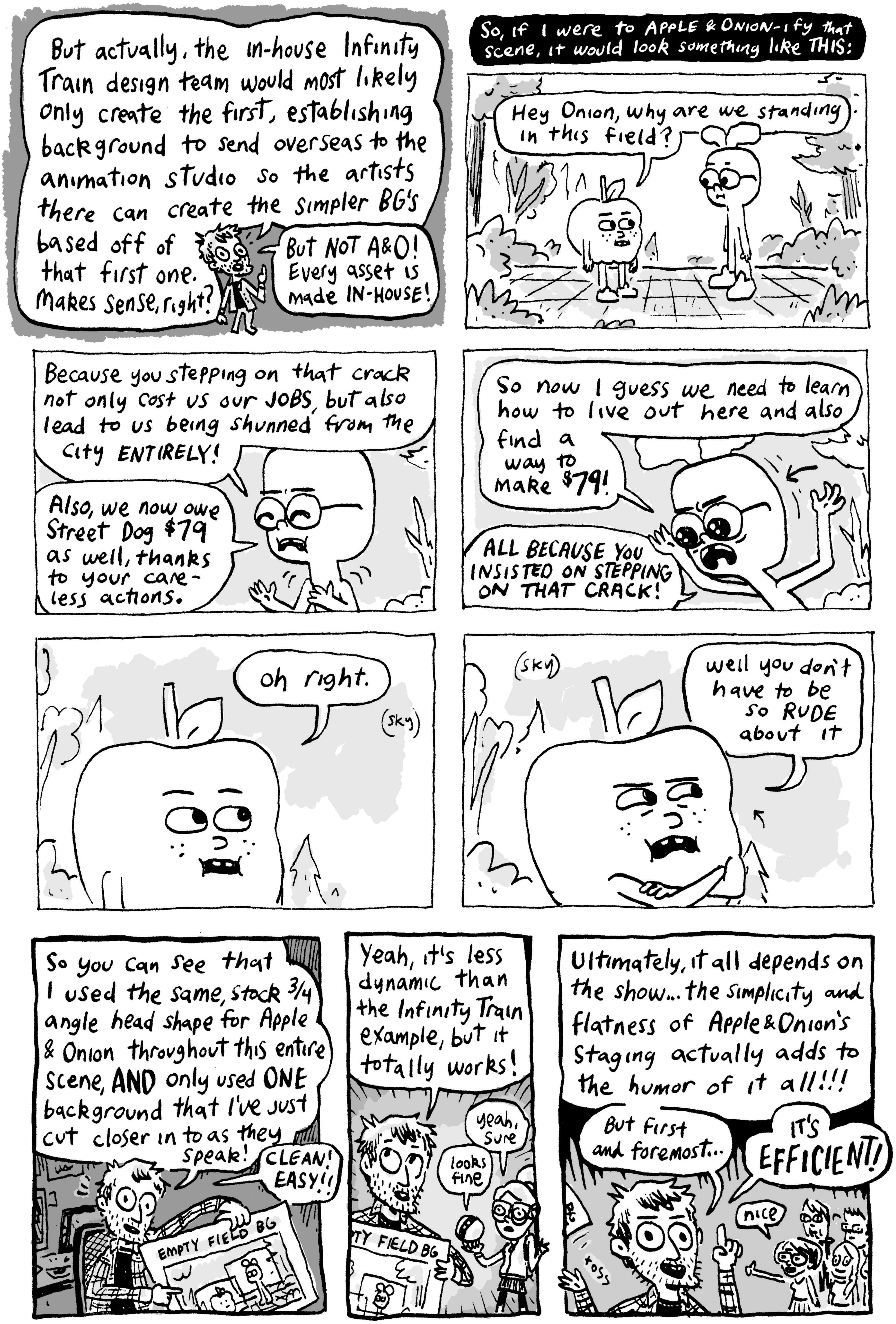
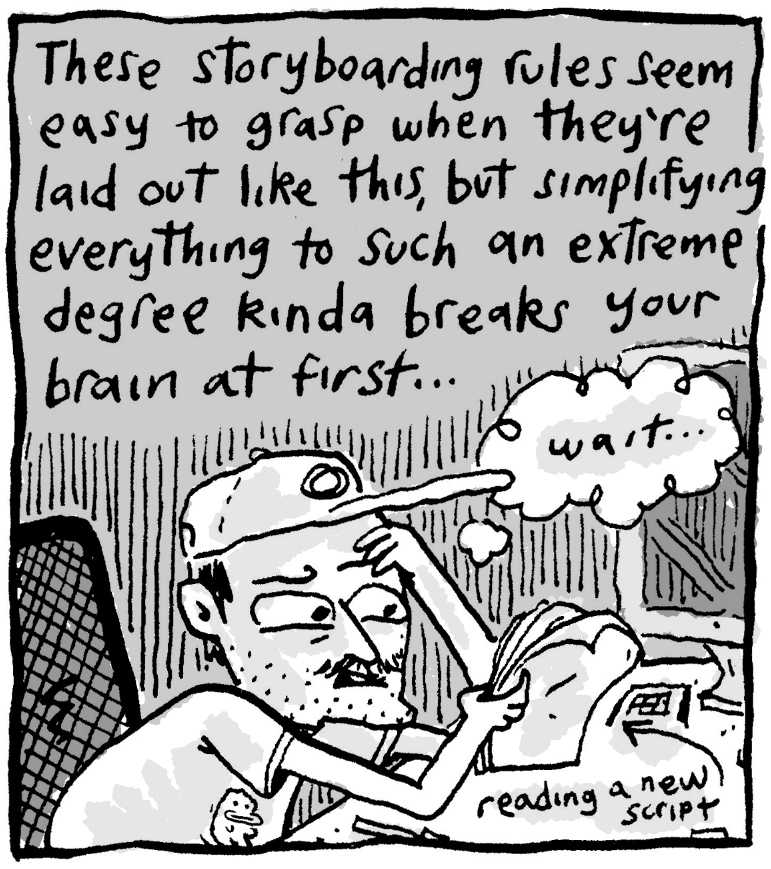
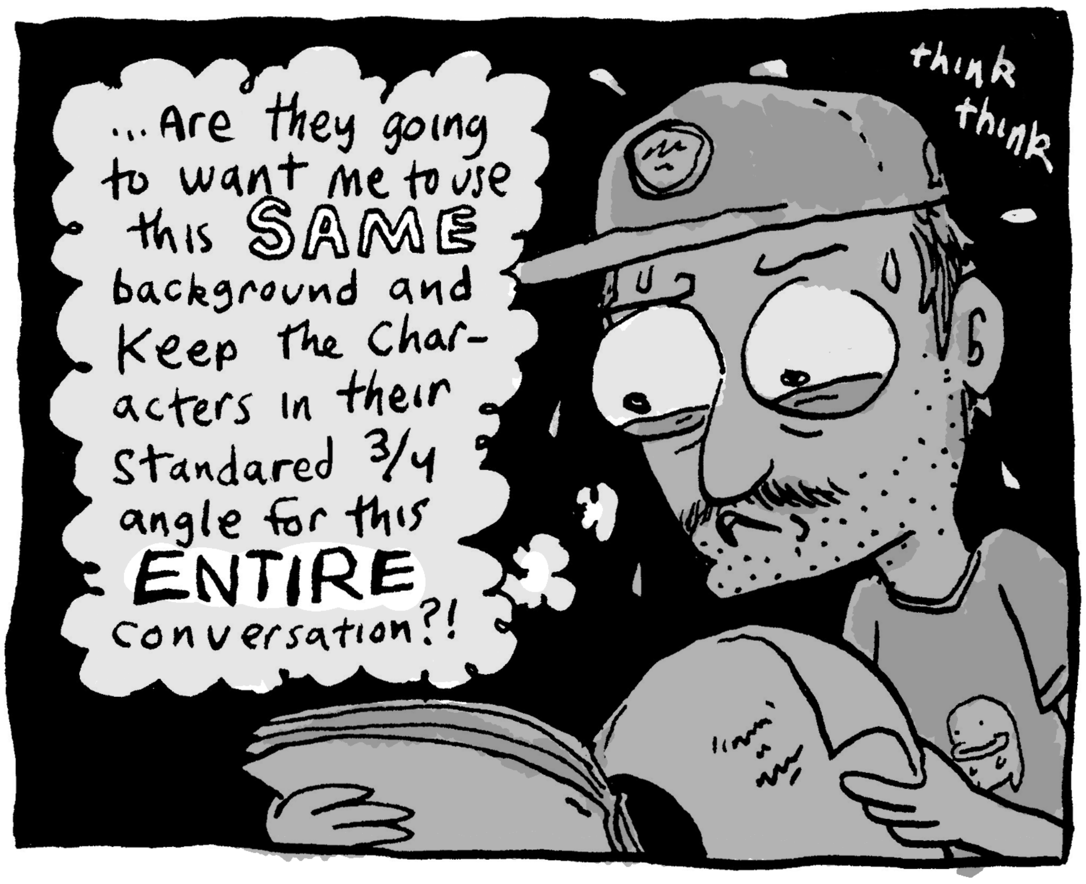

Honestly, I used to think that animating digitally was the "CHEAPER and EASIER" option, but that's dumb, it's just DIFFERENT.
So now you're asking "What does all of this have to do with the storyboard artists?!"
uh
sure
This is you
Well it means that we have to...
!!!
STICK TO THE MODEL SHEETS!
oh
Sure, you're always supposed to do that
I always tape the character line-up right in front of my workspace to reference constantly
squint
draw
I actually tape up TONS of reference
hmmn...
well... CLOSE ENOUGH!
Boooooo
But there's usually some leeway, because I know the animators will eventually "FIX" it...
But on A&O, you really, REALLY have to stick to the model sheets. For example, if I were to draw Onion reading a book, my instinct would be to draw something like this:
read read
Even if I drew the correct proportions and Onion is "on model", the animator might not have this slightly down-turned angle of Onion's head in his library of heads
He's right
I don't
That means that one of the three character designers on the A&O crew would have to create an ENTIRELY new asset of this extremely specific reading angle to send to the animator
the CHARACTER DESIGNERS
now ask yourself... is all that extra work worth it just to show Onion reading a BOOK?!
NO!
??

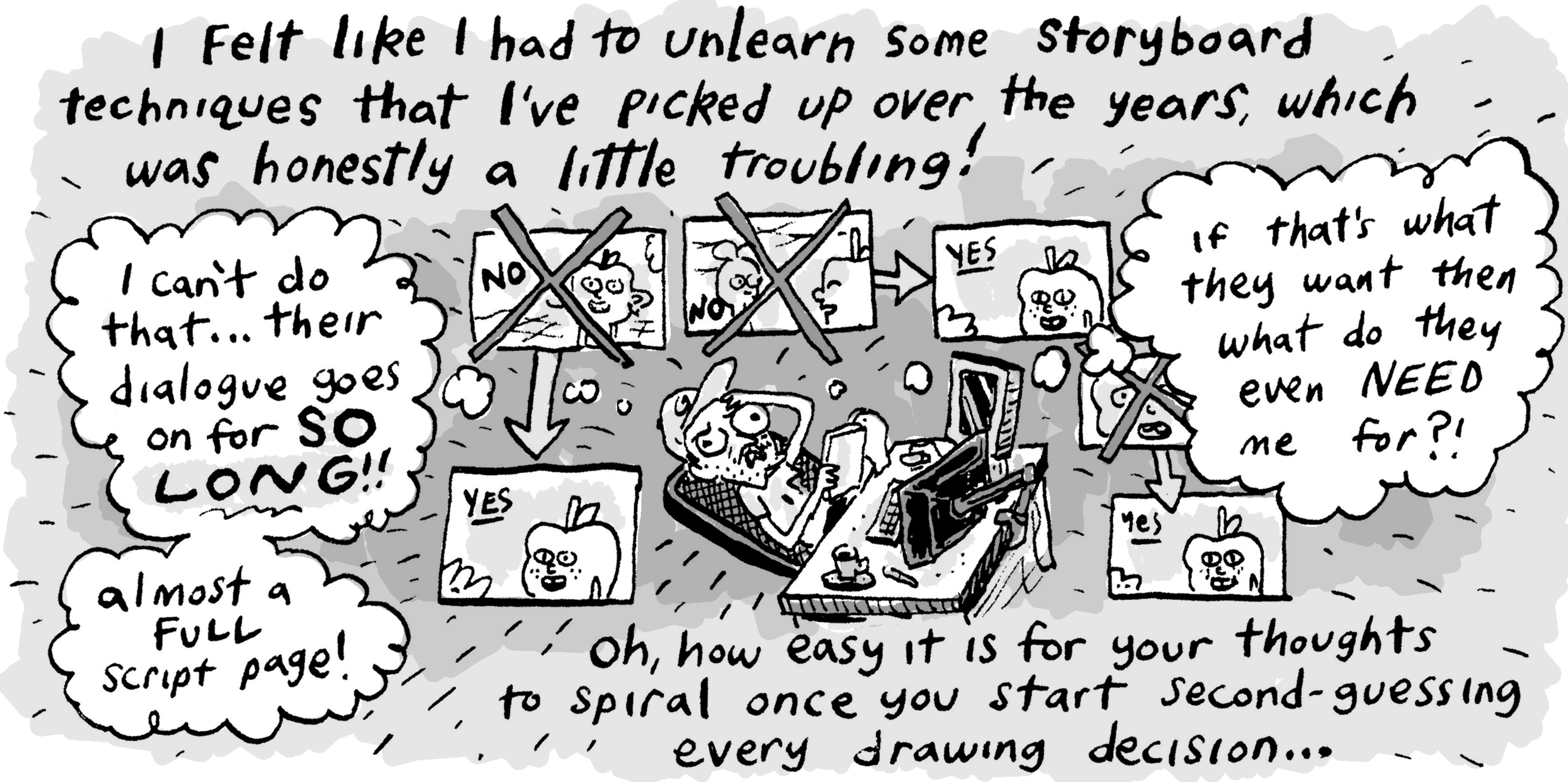

OF COURSE NOT!!!
Even if I were to draw Onion reading like that, 99% of the time I'd be told to change it and use Onion's Standard 3/4 head model
which would look like this:
read read
Definitely less natural, but it's such a minor action, the viewer wouldn't think it looks weird at all
And since it's a stock pose, that means there's no extra work for the in-house character designers
nice!
still gotta make an asset far that book tho
yeah
BUT THERE ARE PLENTY OF TIMES WHEN A SPECIAL POSE IS ABSOLUTELY NEEDED
Like, if I wanted to show Apple stepping on something that sets off the whole episode, you COULD use standard models,
LIKE THIS:
But since it's such a pivotal moment in the story, it's worth the extra man-power to create a new asset for the animators and draw this extreme angle
LIKE THIS:
ok, I'm going to step on this mysterious crack, hopefully nothing bad happens that sets of an 11-minute adventure
DO NOT STEP
What's your deal with stepping on everything, anyways?
So I'd choose to include that "harder" shot as it heightens the storytelling... which is the whole point of my job in the first place, right?!
RIGHT.
PROUD
HEY!!
Forgetting something?
?
oh... right
this philosophy also applies to backgrounds
The background design/color team

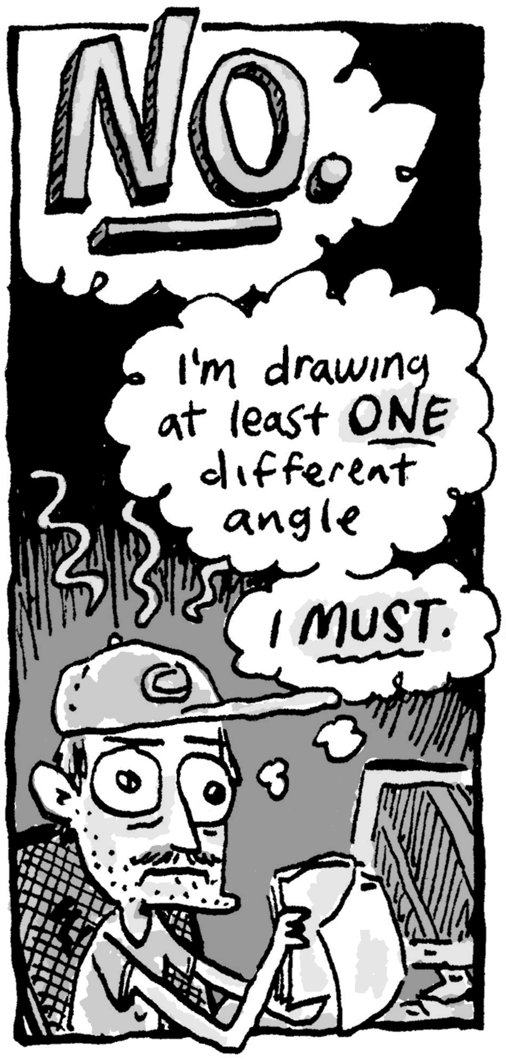

As a board artist, you strive to use as many pre-existing backgrounds as possible when choosing shots, and are conscious of how many new ones you choose to make
But they add up quickly!! let me demonstrate with a quick Infinity Train example. If I were to storyboard a conversation between Tulip and One-One, it might look like THIS:
First I would show them together in an establishing shot like this
so, One-One... you stand in empty fields often?
and then cut into them as they speak to keep it visually interesting
Empty fields...? Miss Tulip we're standing on a mass grave. Don't you remember?
(grass)
All those orphans...
gone.
(grass)
oh.
right.
(SKY)
Sometimes I forget how messed up our show is.
(SKY)
right?
Jeez
That's a pretty standard back + forth, but look, That's THREE different backgrounds!

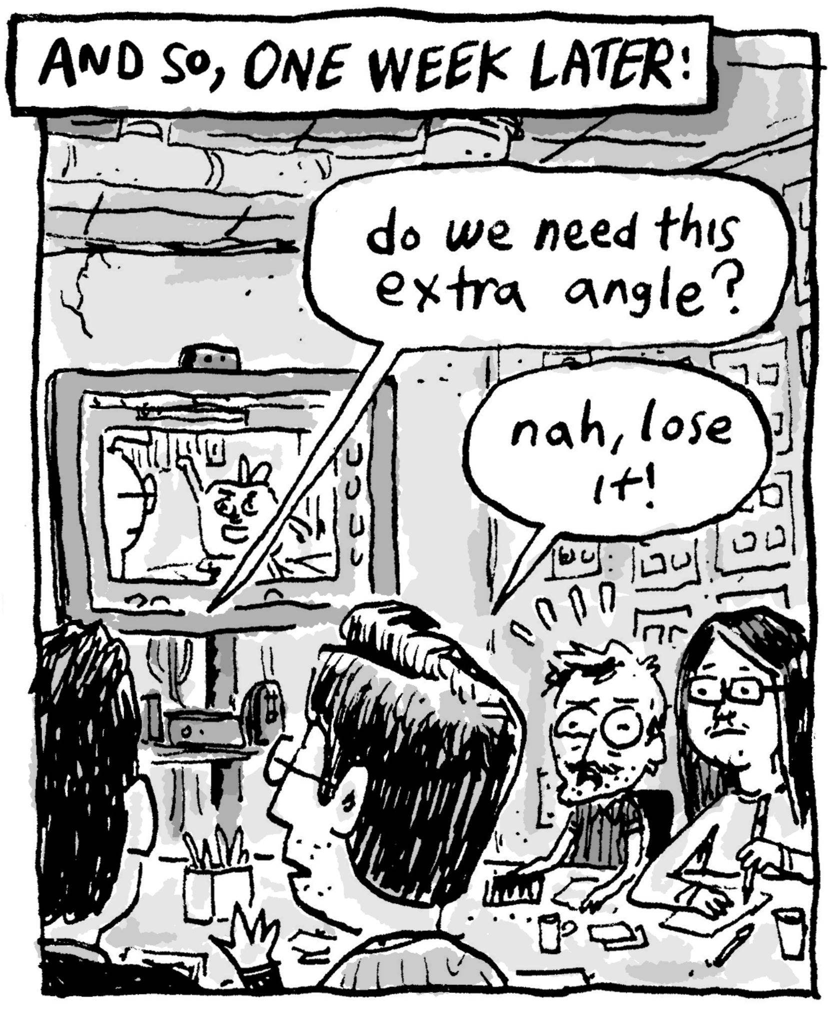

But actually, the in-house Infinity Train design team would most likely only create the first, establishing background to send overseas to the animation studio so the artists there can create the simpler BG's based off of that first one. Makes sense, right?
But NOT A&O! Every asset is made IN-HOUSE!
So, if I were to APPLE & ONION-ify that scene, it would look something like THIS:
Hey Onion, why are we standing in this field?
Because you stepping on that crack not only cost us our JOBS, but also lead to us being shunned from the city ENTIRELY!
Also, we now owe Street Dog $79 as well, thanks to your careless actions.
So now I guess we need to learn how to live out here and also find a way to make $79!
ALL BECAUSE YOU INSISTED ON STEPPING ON THAT CRACK!
oh right.
(sky)
(sky)
well you don't have to be so RUDE about it
So you can see that I used the same, stock 3/4 angle head shape for Apple & Onion throughout this entire scene, AND only used ONE background that I've just cut closer in to as they speak!
CLEAN! EASY!!
EMPTY FIELD BG
Yeah, it's less dynamic than the Infinity Train example, but it totally works!
yeah, sure
looks fine
TY FIELD BG
Ultimately, it all depends on the show... the simplicity and flatness of Apple & Onion's staging actually adds to the humor of it all!!!
But first and foremost...
IT'S EFFICIENT!
nice
toss

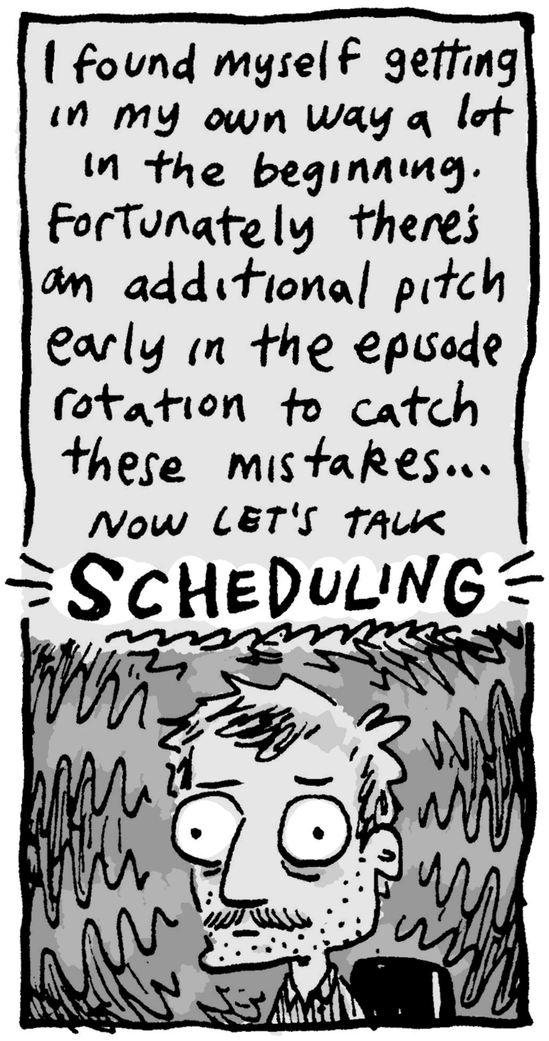

These storyboarding rules seem easy to grasp when they're laid out like this, but simplifying everything to such an extreme degree kinda breaks your brain at first...
wait...
reading a new script


think think
...Are they going to want me to use this SAME background and keep the characters in their standard 3/4 angle for this ENTIRE conversation?!

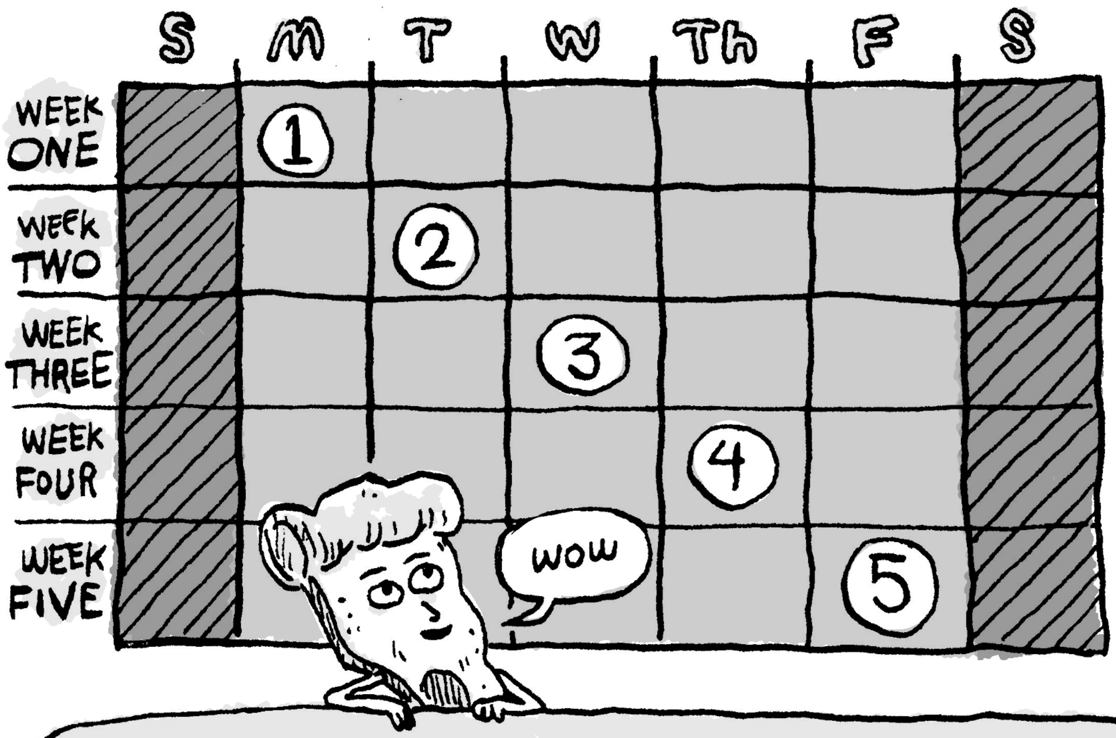

I felt like I had to unlearn some storyboard techniques that I've picked up over the years, which was honestly a little troubling!
I can't do that... their dialogue goes on for SO LONG!!
almost a FULL script page!
NO
NO
YES
YES
YES
If that's what they want then what do they even NEED me for?!
Oh, how easy it is for your thoughts to spiral once you start second-guessing every drawing decision...


NO.
I'm drawing at least ONE different angle
I MUST.


AND SO, ONE WEEK LATER!
do we need this extra angle?
nah, lose it!


I found myself getting in my own way a lot in the beginning. Fortunately there's an additional pitch early in the episode rotation to catch these mistakes... Now LET'S TALK SCHEDULING

Here's what the A&O board schedule looked like in my Calvin phase:


S M T W Th F S
WEEK ONE
WEEK TWO
WEEK THREE
WEEK FOUR
WEEK FIVE
①
②
③
④
⑤
wow

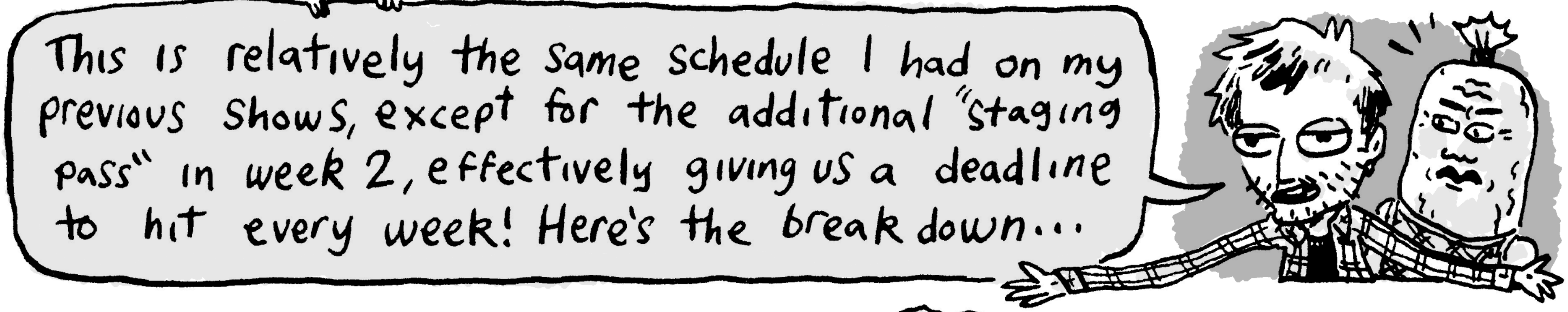
① EPISODE HANDOUT

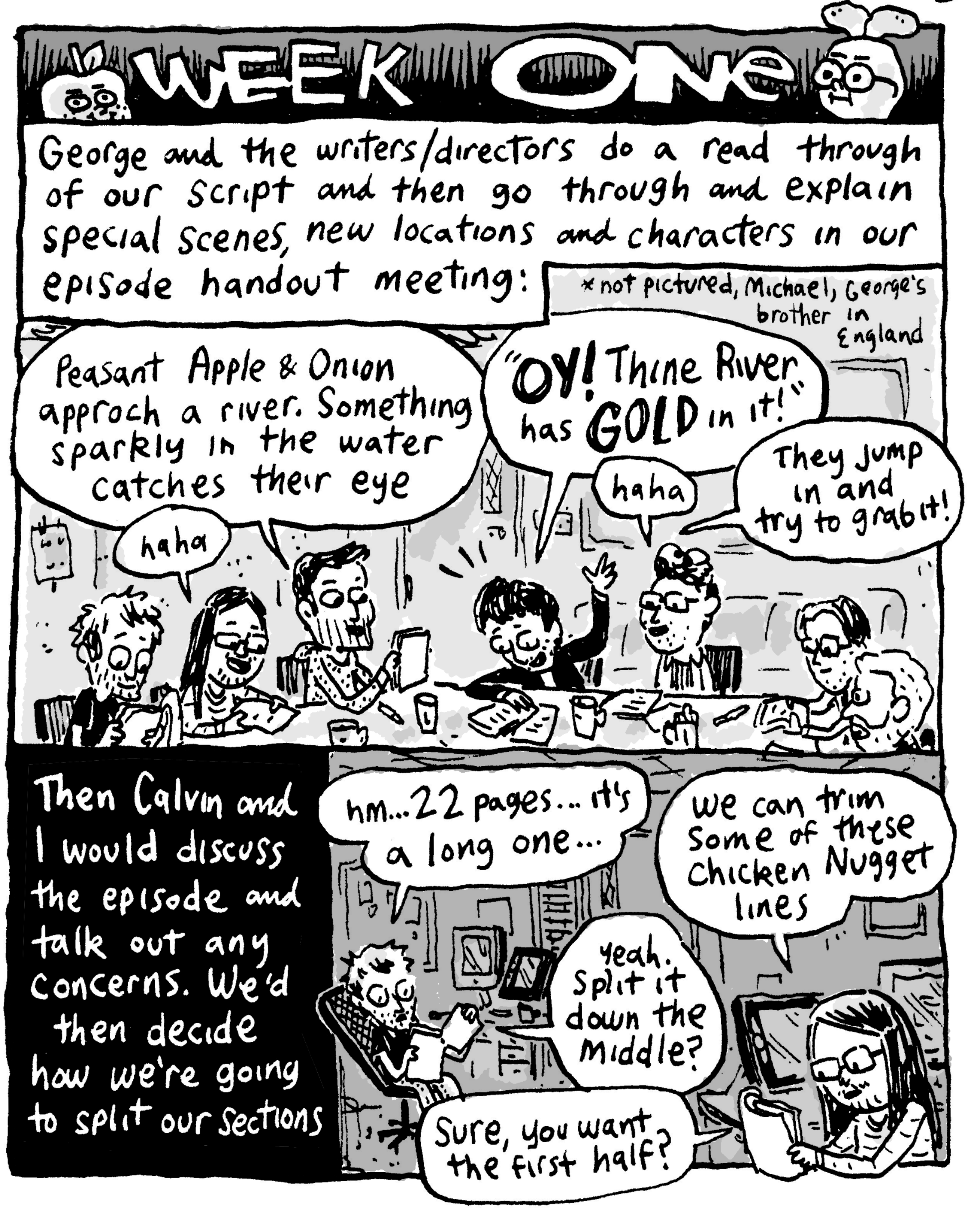
② STAGING PASS (pitch 1)

③ THUMBNAIL PASS (pitch 2)

④ CREW PITCH (pitch 3)

⑤ HAND IN COMPLETED EPISODE!


This is relatively the same schedule I had on my previous shows, except for the additional "staging pass" in week 2, effectively giving us a deadline to hit every week! Here's the break down...



WEEK ONE

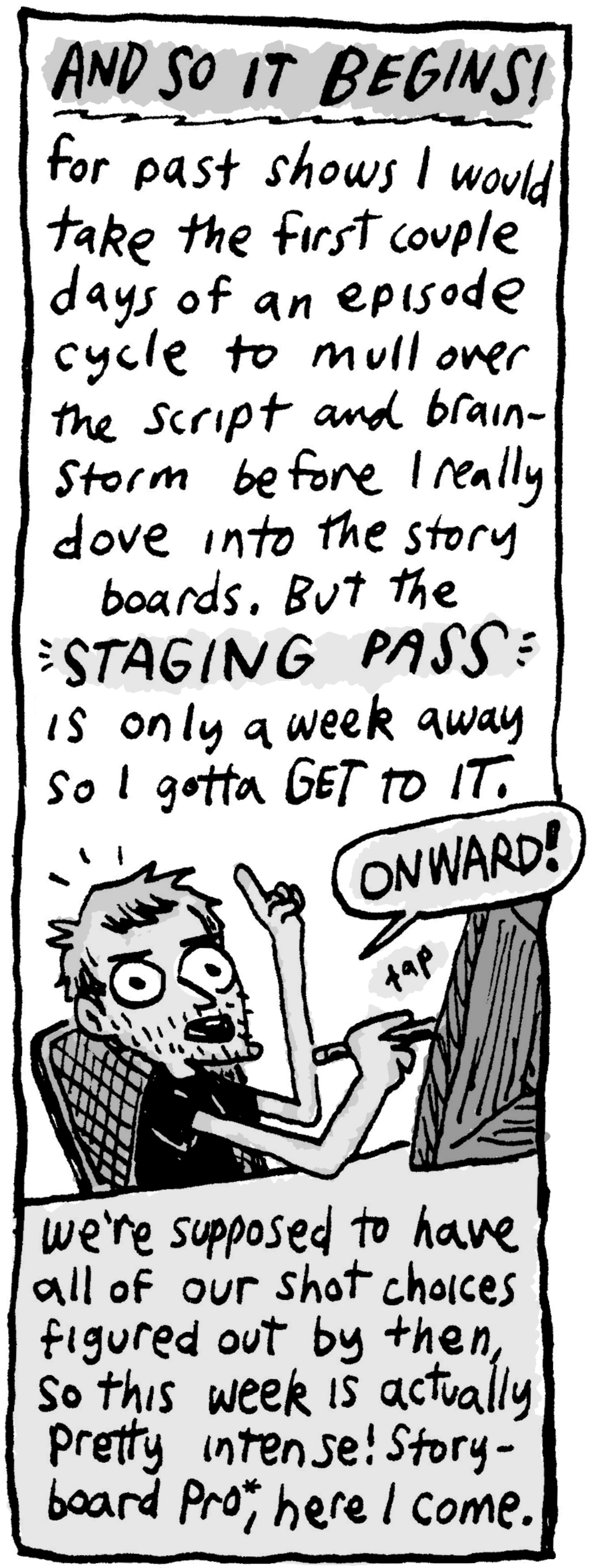
George and the writers/directors do a read through of our script and then go through and explain special scenes, new locations and characters in our episode handout meeting:

*not pictured, Michael, George's brother in England

Peasant Apple & Onion approch a river. Something sparkly in the water catches their eye
haha
"OY! Thine River has GOLD in it!"
haha
They jump in and try to grab it!

Then Calvin and I would discuss the episode and talk out any concerns. We'd then decide how we're going to split our sections

hm...22 pages... it's a long one...
we can trim some of these Chicken Nugget lines
yeah. Split it down the Middle?
Sure, you want the first half?



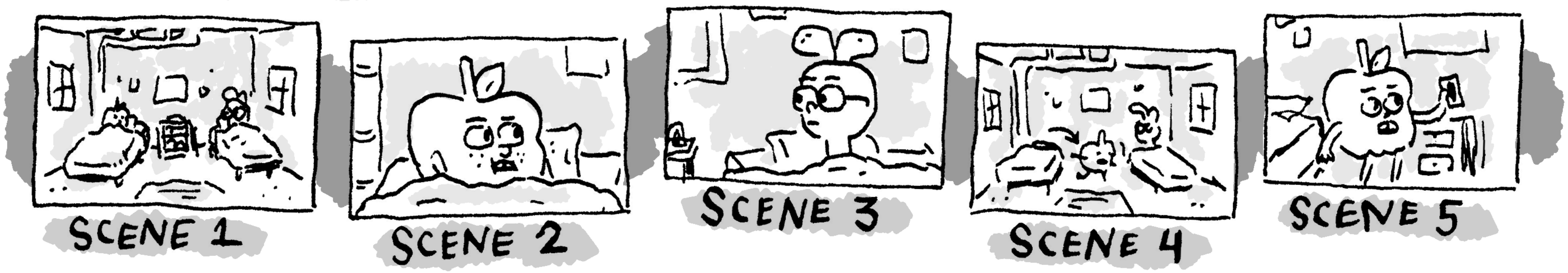
AND SO IT BEGINS!

for past shows I would take the first couple days of an episode cycle to mull over the script and brainstorm before I really dove into the story boards. But the STAGING PASS is only a week away so I gotta GET TO IT.

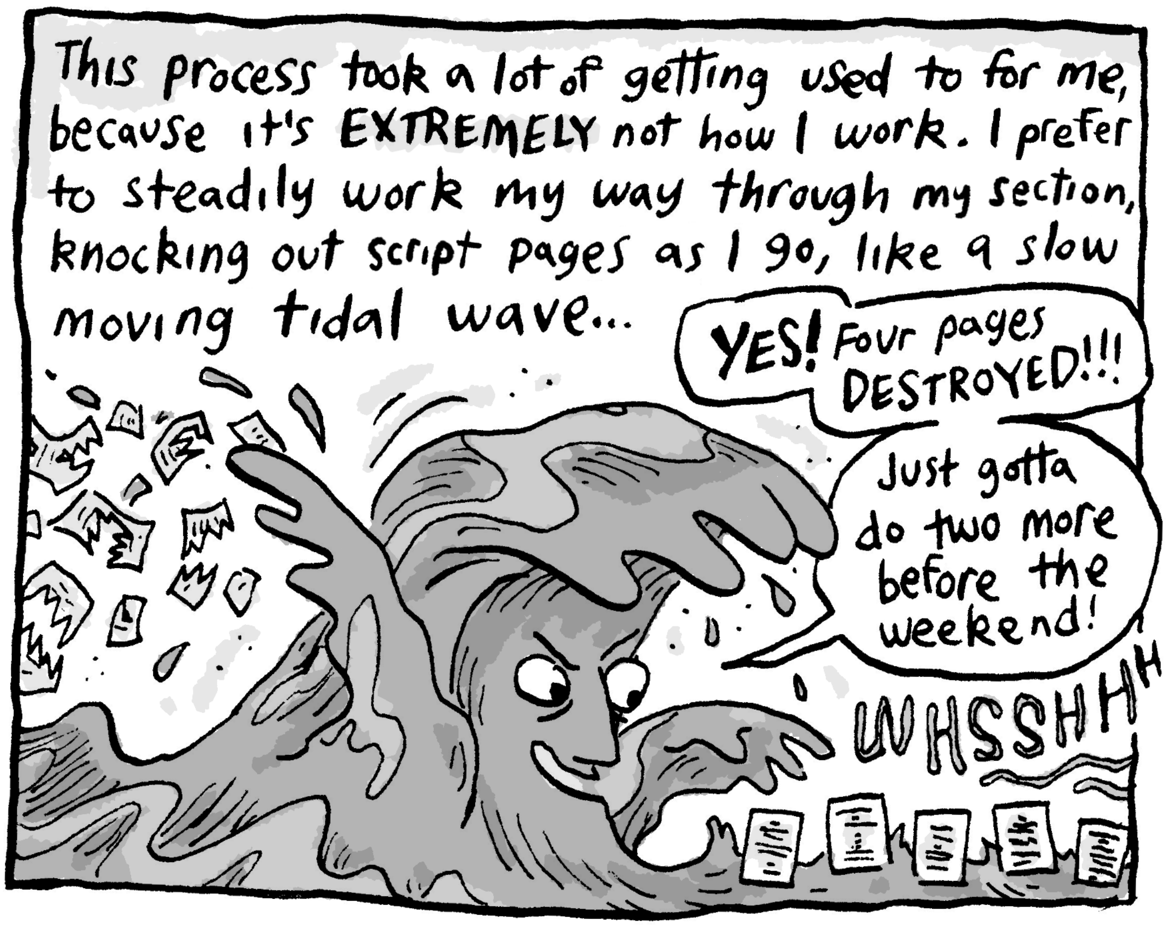
we're supposed to have all of our shot choices figured out by then, so this week is actually pretty intense! Storyboard Pro*, here I come.

*the program we use

This pass is all **PLANNING** and **DECISION MAKING**. They're not looking for acting poses, just pure technical staging for each shot you choose. Ideally, you're figuring out all the camera angles and **THAT'S IT.**

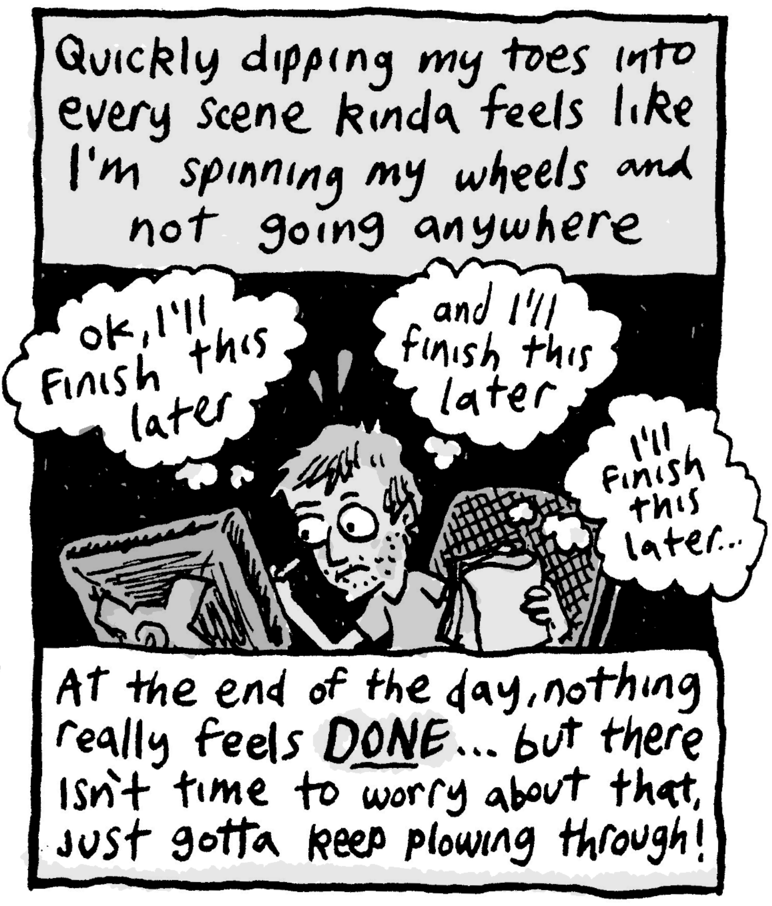

SCENE 1
SCENE 2
SCENE 3
SCENE 4
SCENE 5

Also these drawings don't have to be clean, as this is a "pre-thumbnail" stage



This process took a lot of getting used to for me, because it's **EXTREMELY** not how I work. I prefer to steadily work my way through my section, knocking out script pages as I go, like a slow moving tidal wave...

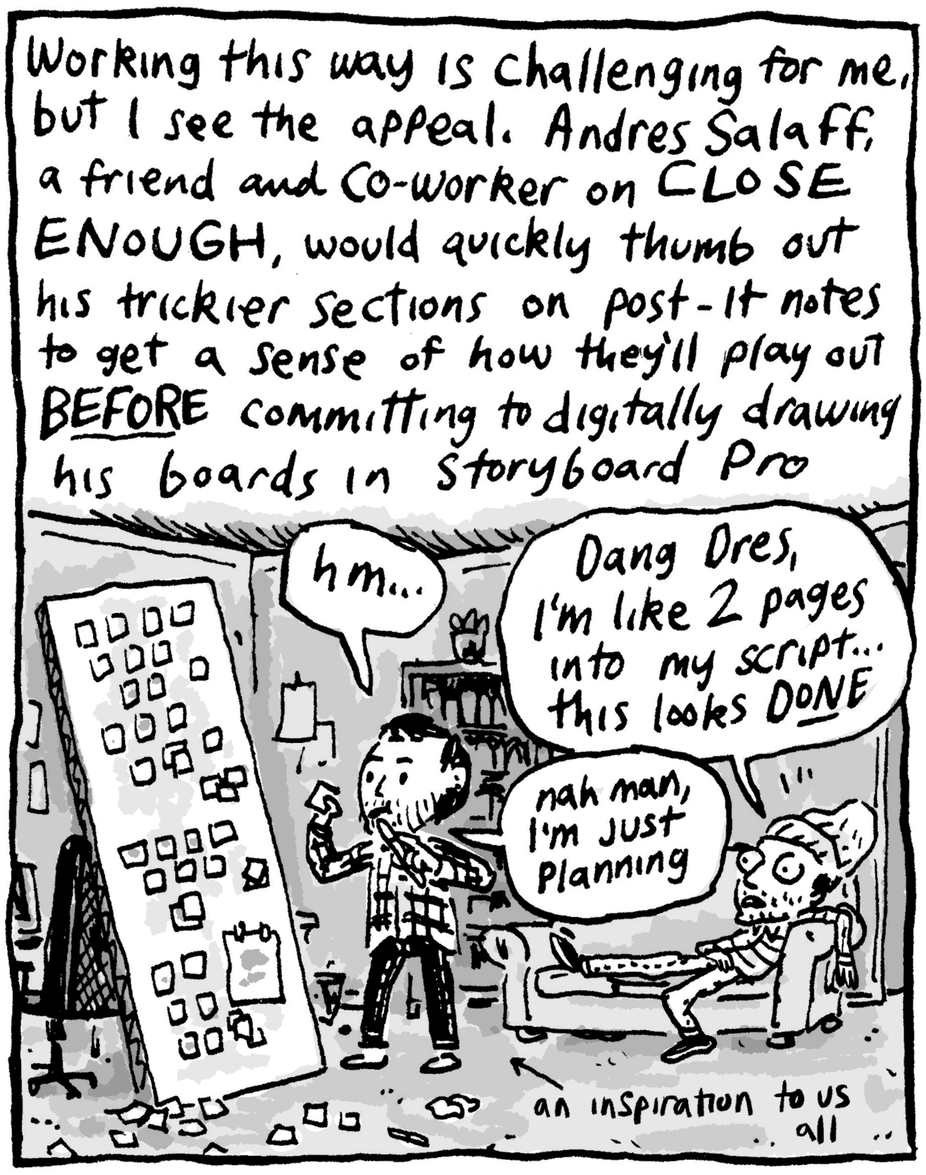
YES! Four pages DESTROYED!!!
Just gotta do two more before the weekend!
WHSSHHH



Quickly dipping my toes into every scene kinda feels like I'm spinning my wheels and not going anywhere

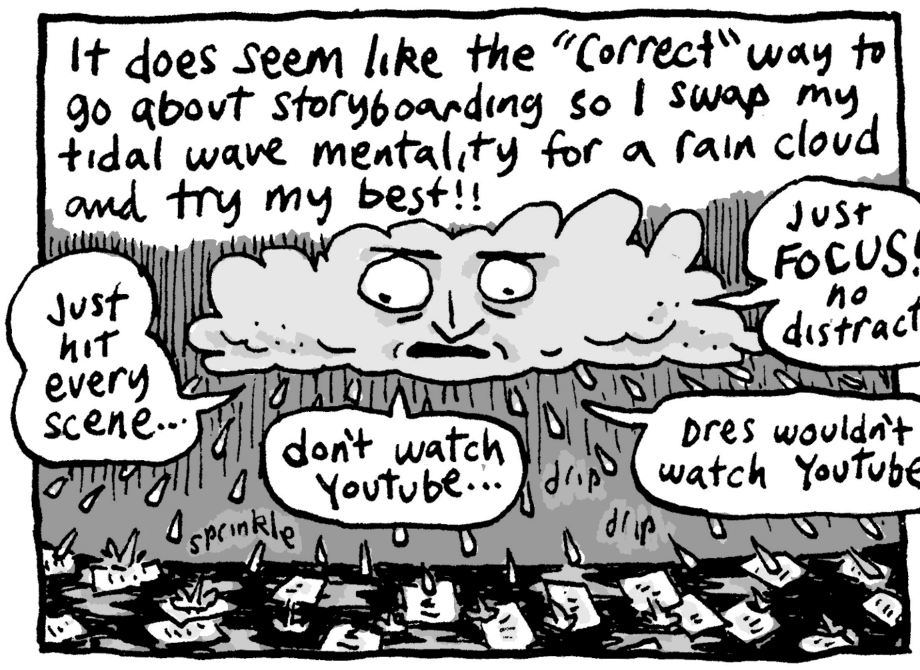
ok, I'll finish this later
and I'll finish this later
I'll finish this later...

At the end of the day, nothing really feels DONE... but there isn't time to worry about that, just gotta keep plowing through!



Working this way is challenging for me, but I see the appeal. Andres Salaff, a friend and co-worker on **CLOSE ENOUGH**, would quickly thumb out his trickier sections on post-it notes to get a sense of how they'll play out **BEFORE** committing to digitally drawing his boards in Storyboard Pro

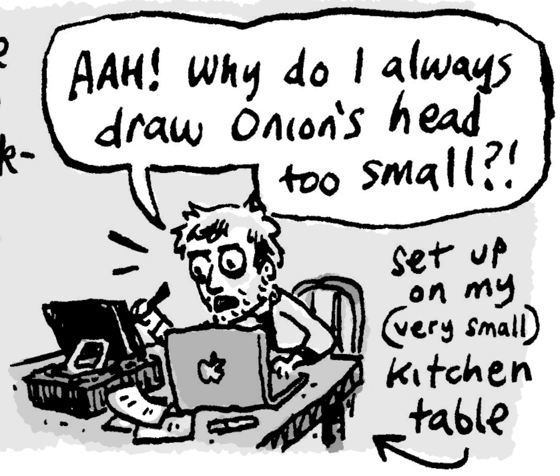
hm...
Dang Dres, I'm like 2 pages into my script... this looks DONE
nah man, I'm just planning
an inspiration to us all

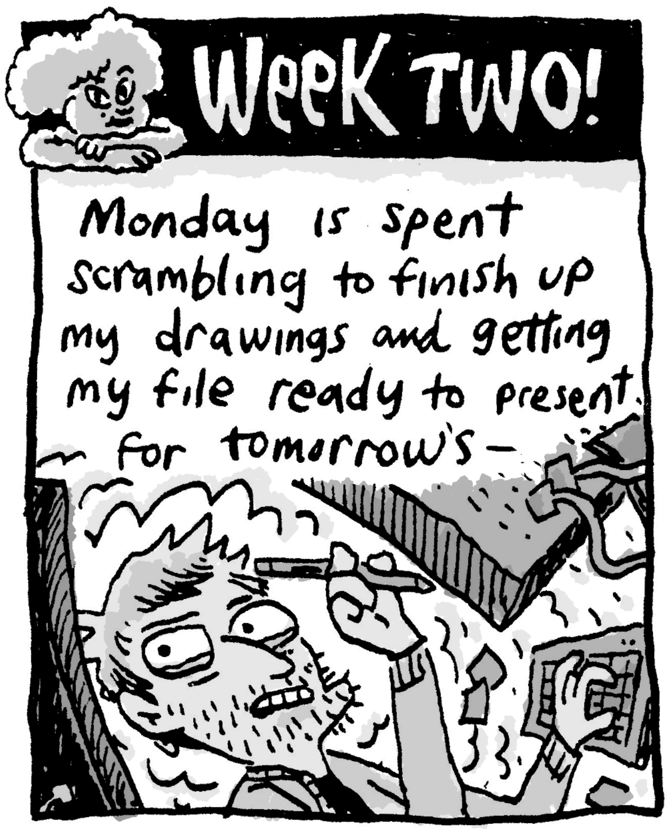


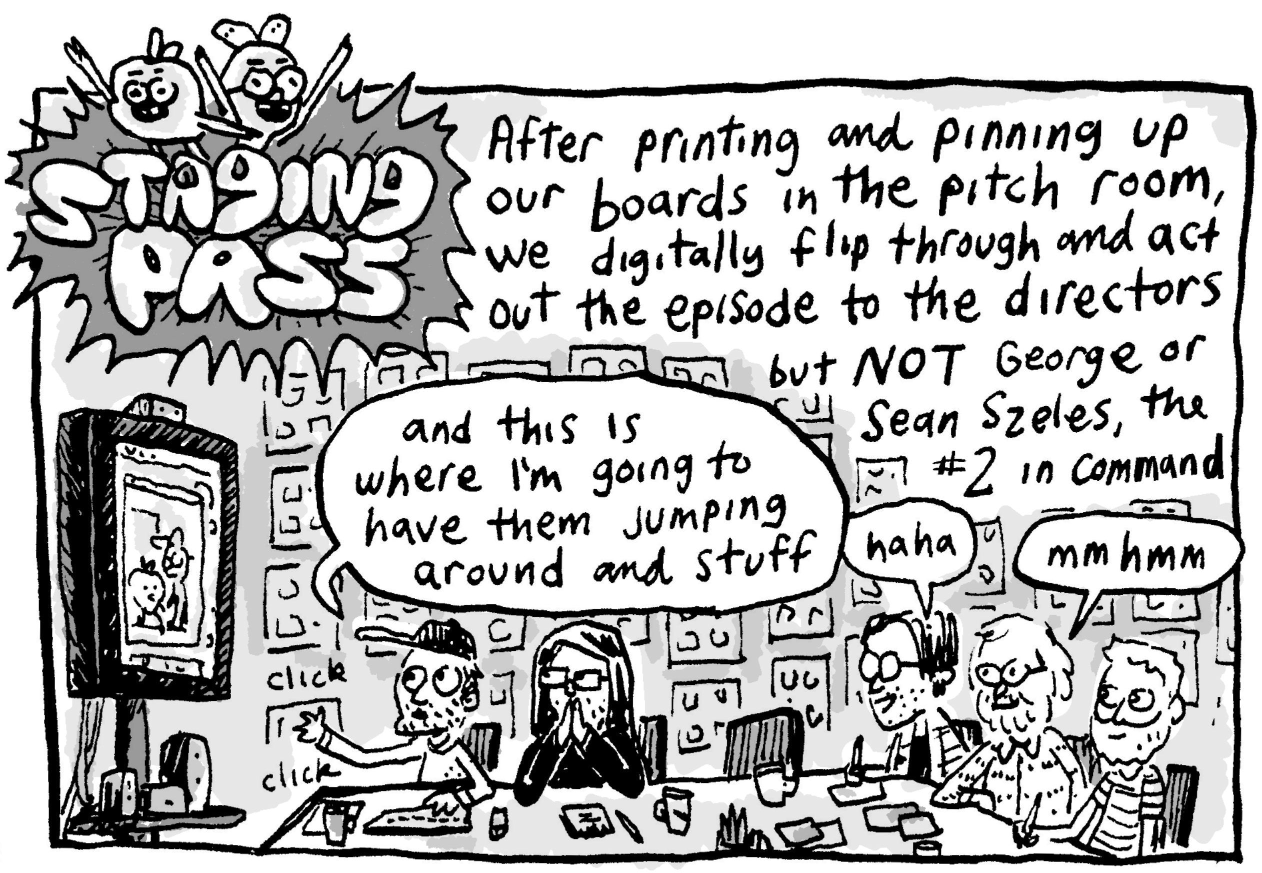
It does seem like the "correct" way to go about storyboarding so I swap my tidal wave mentality for a rain cloud and try my best!!

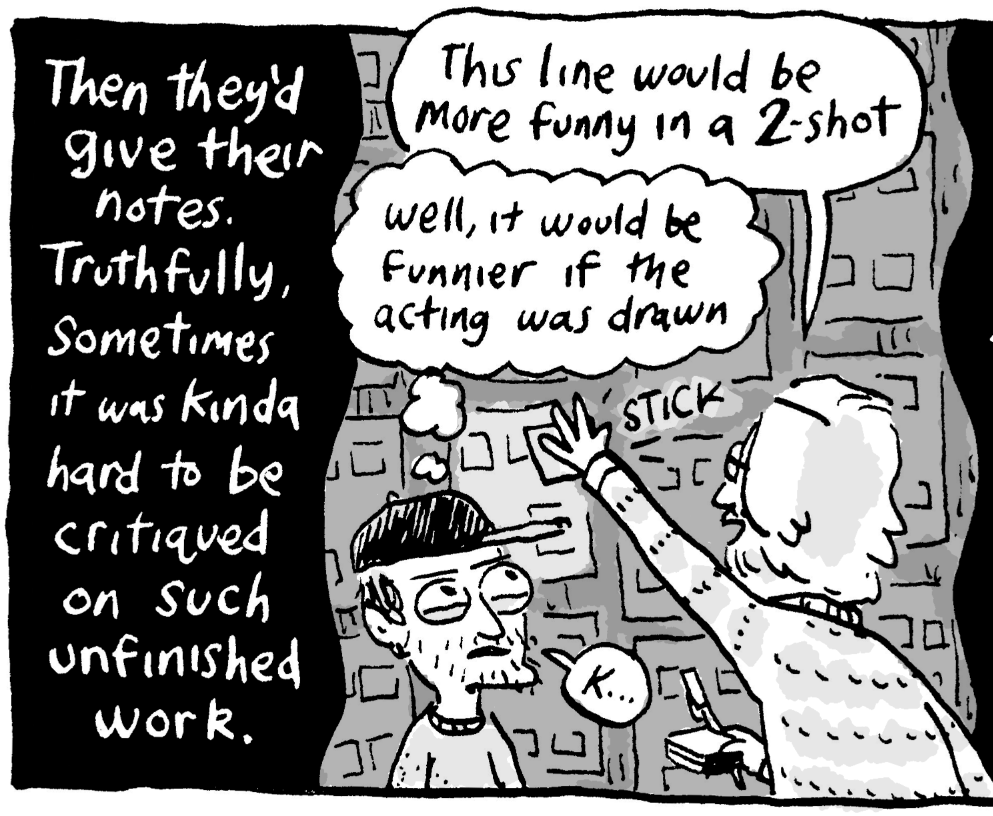
Just hit every scene...
Just FOCUS! no distractions
don't watch Youtube...
Dres wouldn't watch Youtube
sprinkle
drip
drip

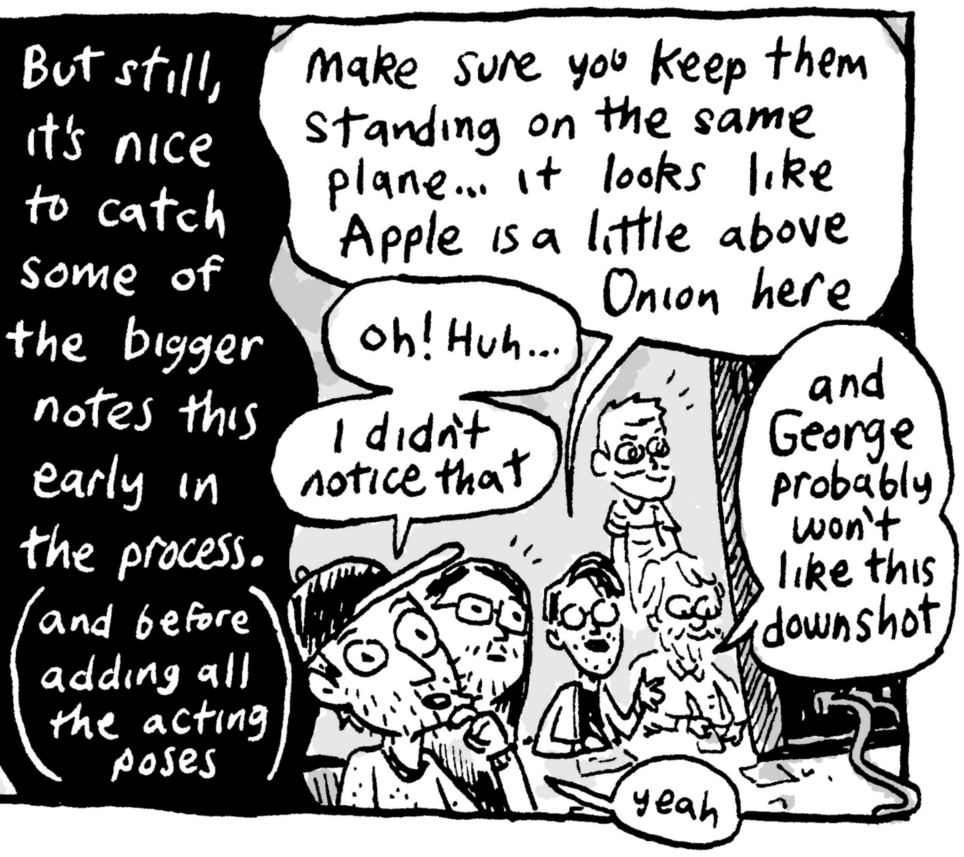
Sometimes I have to work a little on the first weekend if I didn't concentrate well enough (or if it's a particularly long script!)

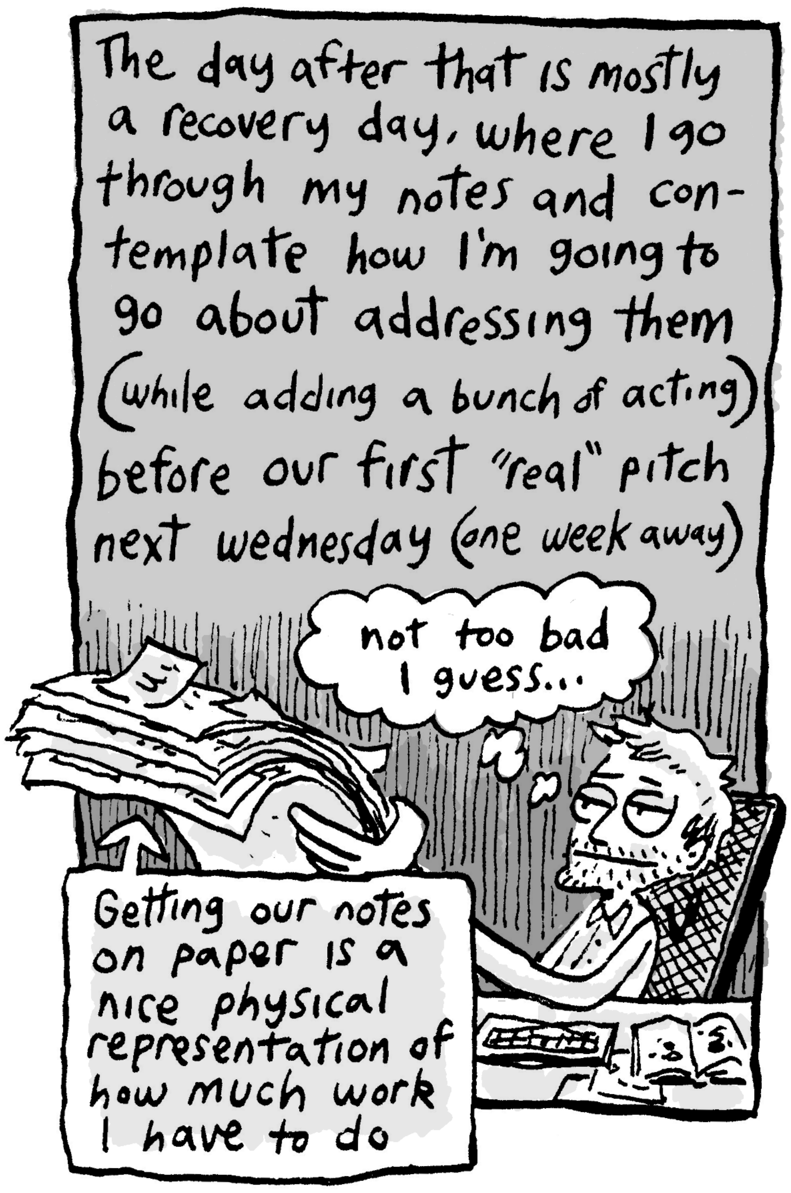

AAH! Why do I always draw Onion's head too small?!
set up on my (very small) kitchen table

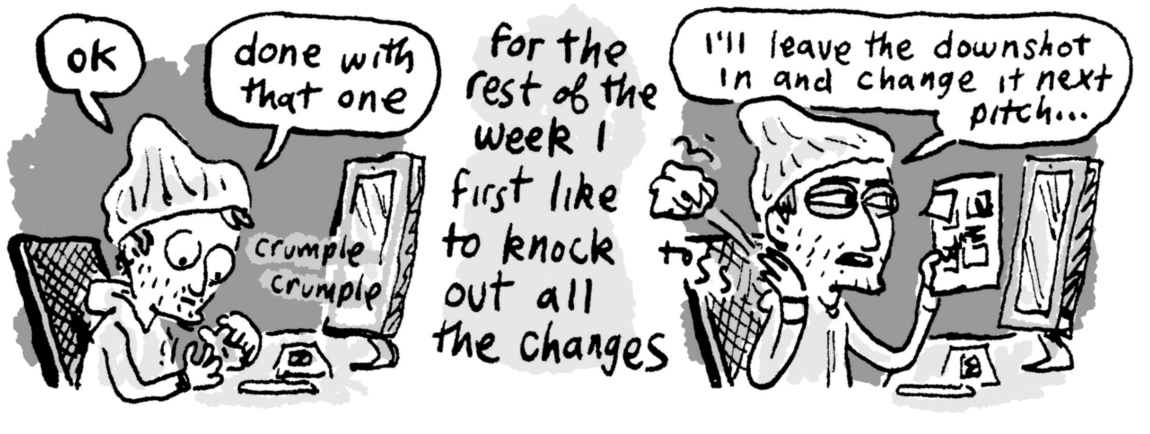

WEEK TWO!
Monday is spent scrambling to finish up my drawings and getting my file ready to present for tomorrow's–

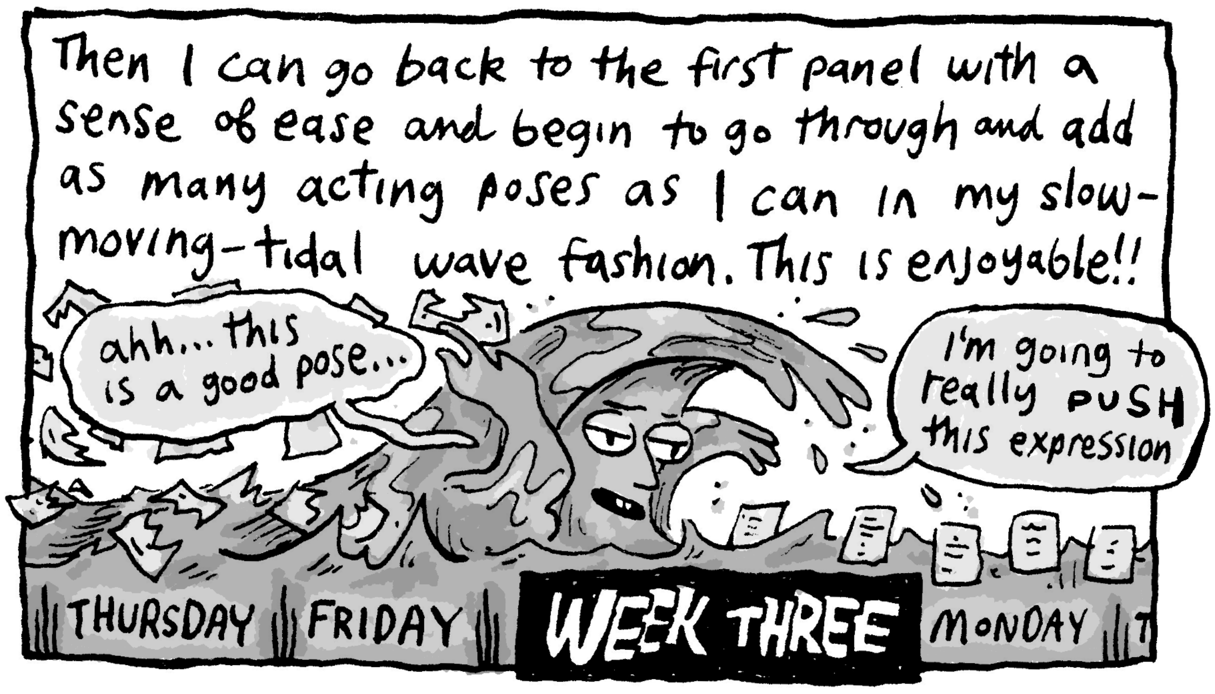

STAGING PASS
After printing and pinning up our boards in the pitch room, we digitally flip through and act out the episode to the directors but NOT George or Sean Szeles, the #2 in command
and this is where I'm going to have them jumping around and stuff
haha
mm hmm
click
click

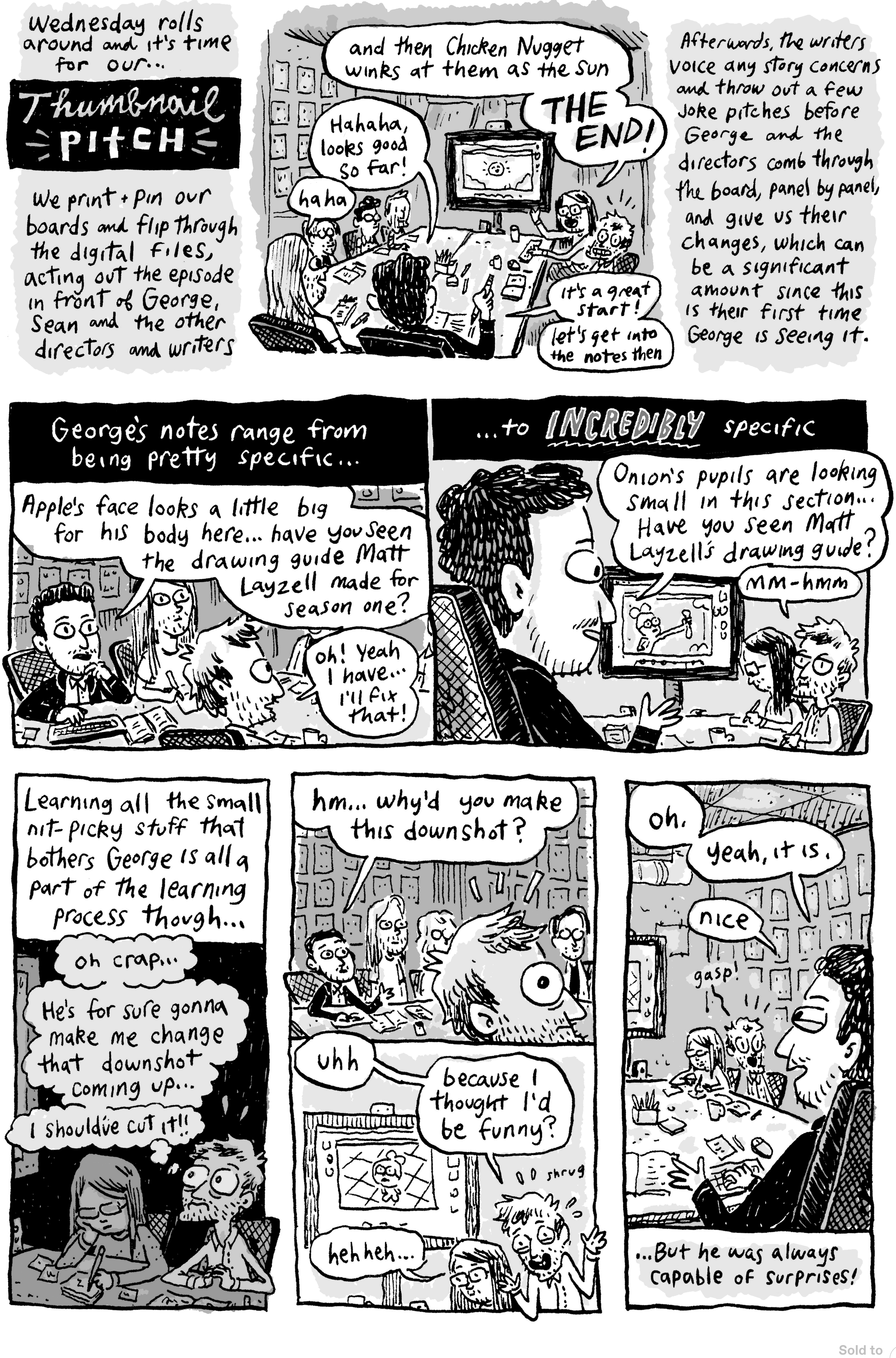

Then they'd give their notes. Truthfully, sometimes it was kinda hard to be critiqued on such unfinished work.
This line would be more funny in a 2-shot
well, it would be funnier if the acting was drawn
STICK
K...


But still, it's nice to catch some of the bigger notes this early in the process.
(and before adding all the acting poses)
Make sure you keep them standing on the same plane... it looks like Apple is a little above Onion here
Oh! Huh...
I didn't notice that
and George probably won't like this downshot
yeah

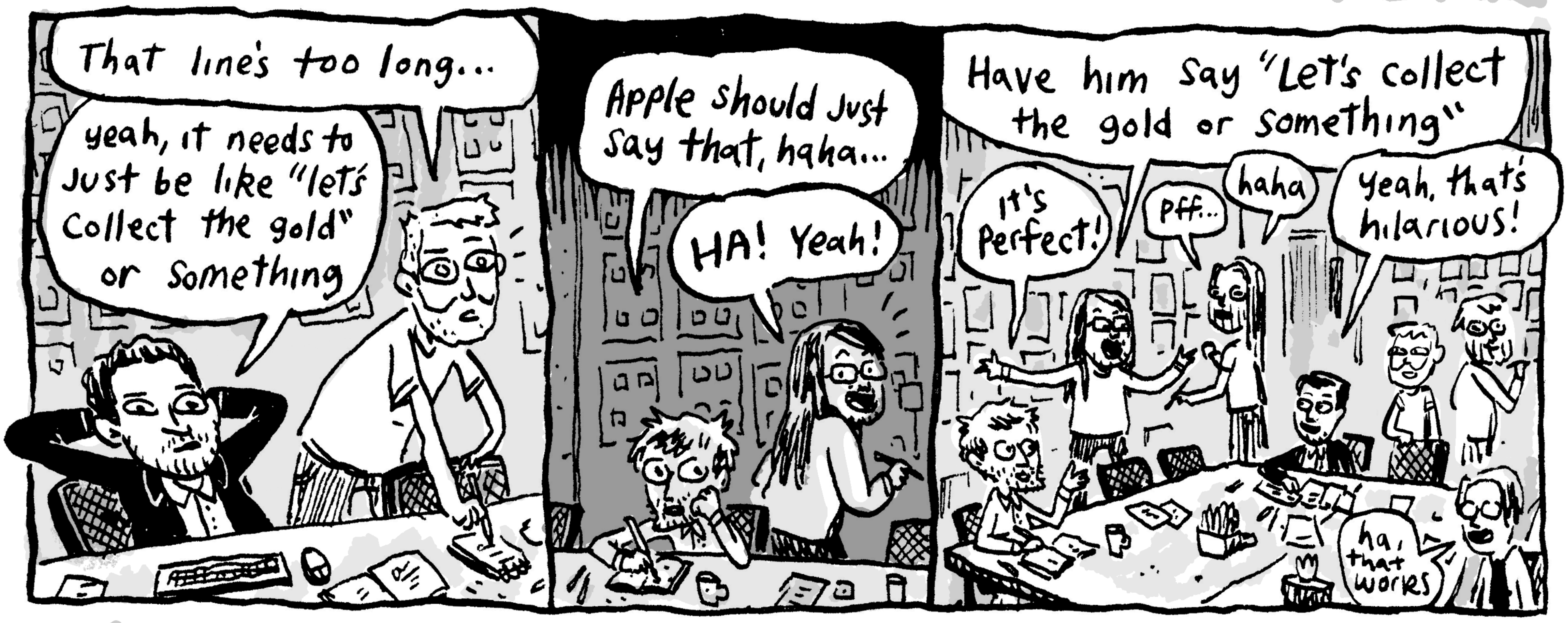

The day after that is mostly a recovery day, where I go through my notes and contemplate how I'm going to go about addressing them (while adding a bunch of acting) before our first "real" pitch next wednesday (one week away)
not too bad I guess...
Getting our notes on paper is a nice physical representation of how much work I have to do


ok
done with that one
crumple
crumple
for the rest of the week I first like to knock out all the changes
I'll leave the downshot in and change it next pitch...
toss

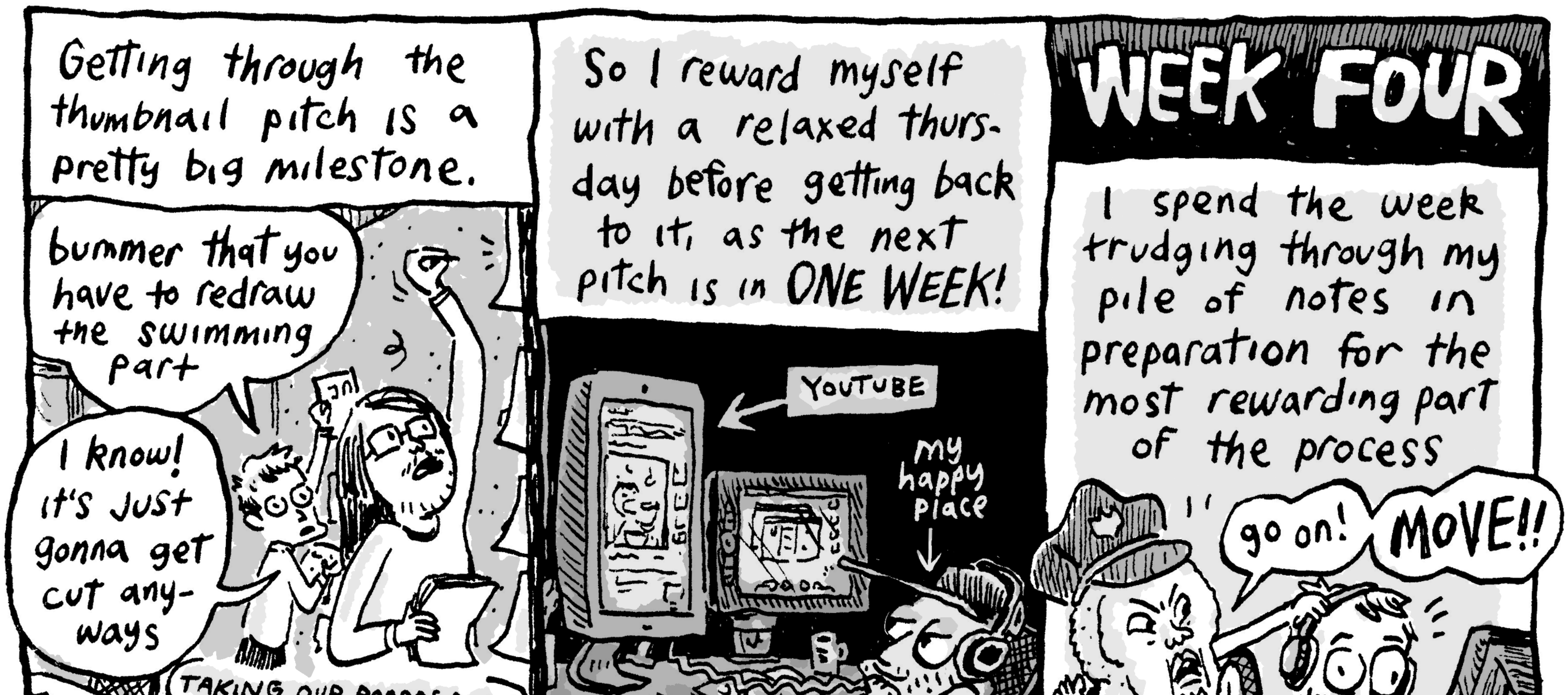

Then I can go back to the first panel with a sense of ease and begin to go through and add as many acting poses as I can in my slow-moving-tidal wave fashion. This is enjoyable!!
ahh... this is a good pose...
I'm going to really PUSH this expression
THURSDAY
FRIDAY
WEEK THREE
MONDAY

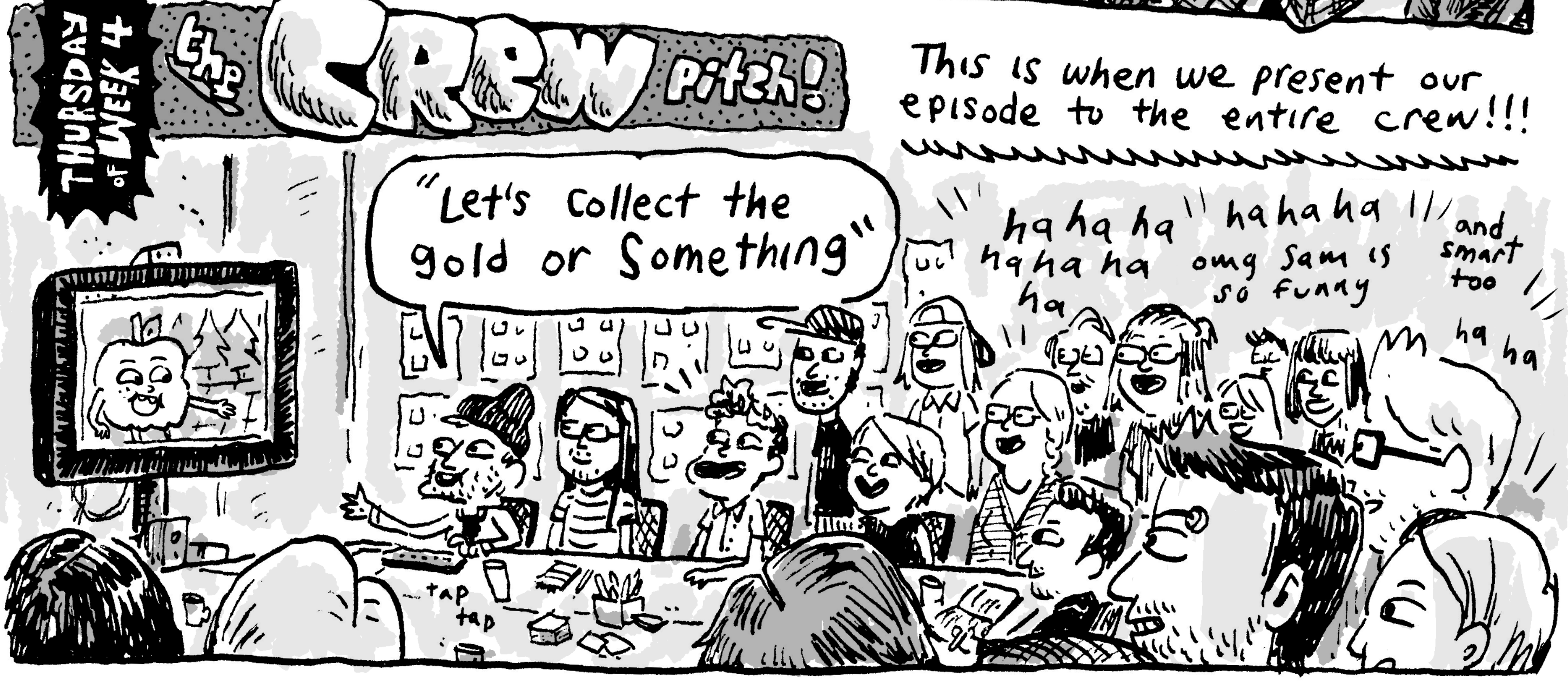

Wednesday rolls around and it's time for our...
Thumbnail PITCH
We print + pin our boards and flip through the digital files, acting out the episode in front of George, Sean and the other directors and writers
and then Chicken Nugget winks at them as the sun
THE END!
Hahaha, looks good so far!
haha
It's a great start! let's get into the notes then
Afterwards, the writers voice any story concerns and throw out a few joke pitches before George and the directors comb through the board, panel by panel, and give us their changes, which can be a significant amount since this is their first time George is seeing it.
George's notes range from being pretty specific...
Apple's face looks a little big for his body here... have you seen the drawing guide Matt Layzell made for season one?
oh! Yeah I have... I'll fix that!
...to INCREDIBLY specific
Onion's pupils are looking small in this section... Have you seen Matt Layzell's drawing guide?
MM-hmm
Learning all the small nit-picky stuff that bothers George is all a part of the learning process though...
oh crap...
He's for sure gonna make me change that downshot coming up...
I should've cut it!!
hm... why'd you make this downshot?
uhh
because I thought I'd be funny?
shrug
heh heh...
oh.
yeah, it is.
nice
gasp!
...But he was always capable of surprises!

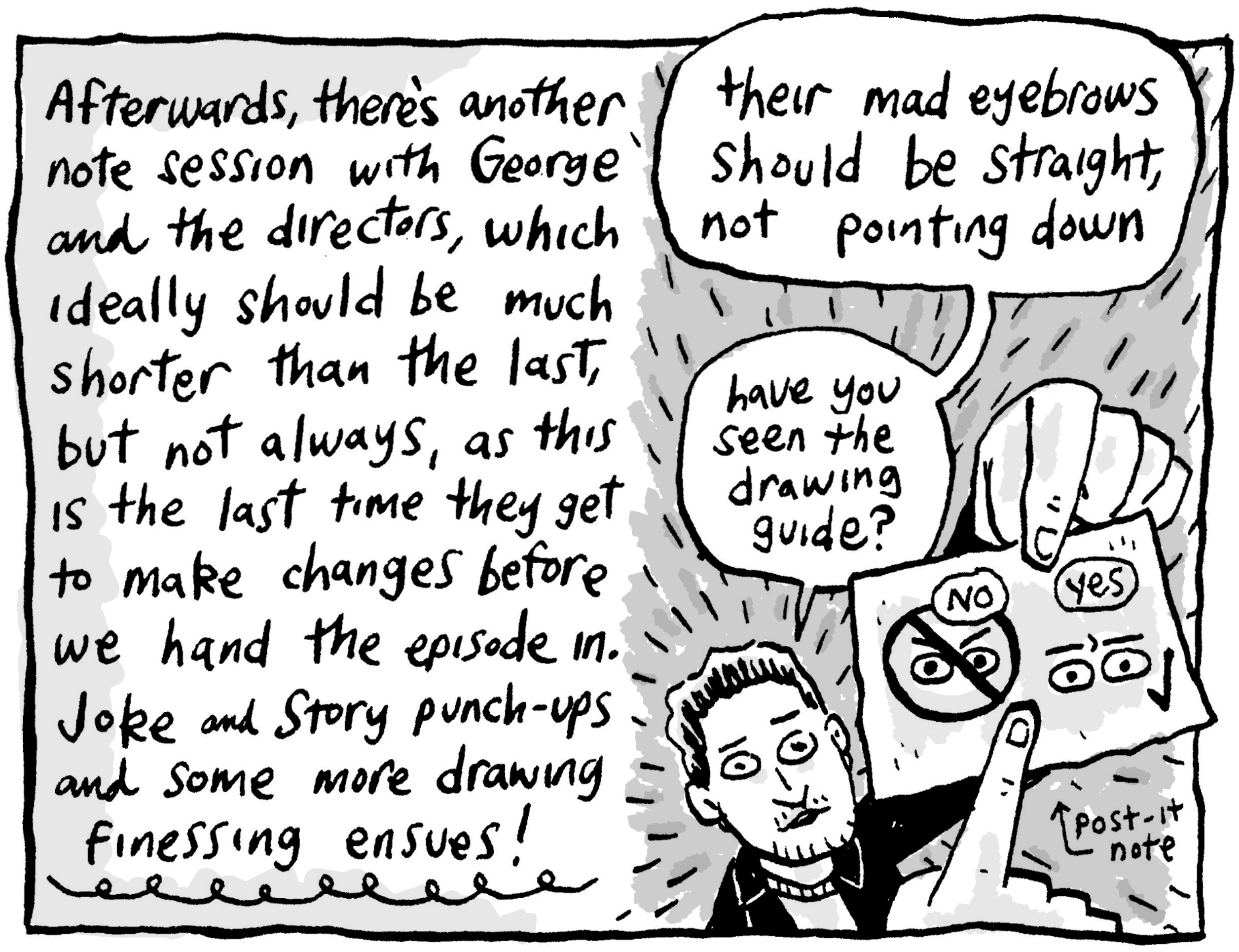
Along with the drawing notes, we also dug into the story. Talking out different beats and jokes often lead to some interesting gems!

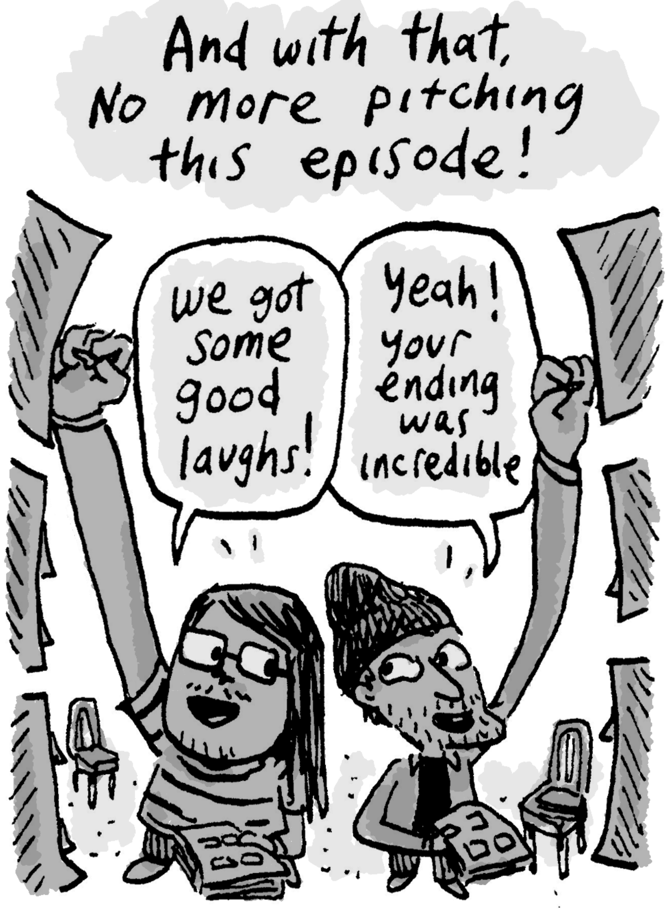

That line's too long...
yeah, it needs to just be like "let's collect the gold" or something
Apple should just say that, haha...
HA! Yeah!
Have him say "Let's collect the gold or something"
It's perfect!
pff...
haha
yeah, that's hilarious!
ha, that works

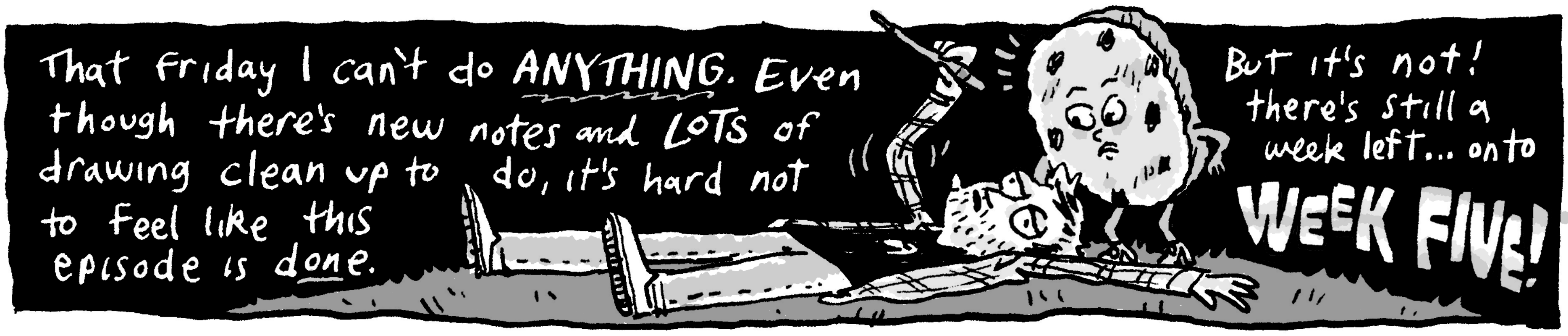
Thumbnail pitch note sessions can take **HOURS**. It's a lot to get through.

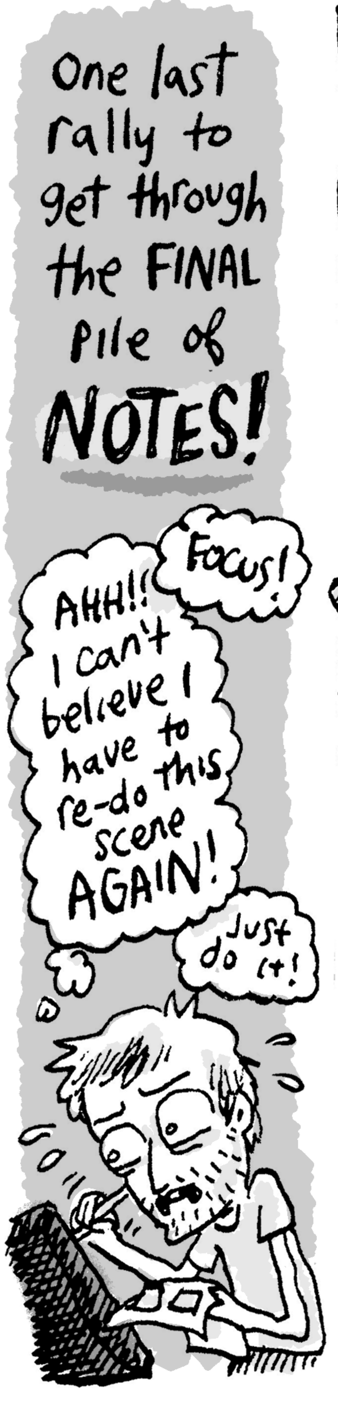

Getting through the thumbnail pitch is a pretty big milestone.
bummer that you have to redraw the swimming part
I know! it's just gonna get cut anyways
(TAKING OUR BOARDS DOWN)
So I reward myself with a relaxed thursday before getting back to it, as the next pitch is in ONE WEEK!
YOUTUBE
my happy place
WEEK FOUR
I spend the week trudging through my pile of notes in preparation for the most rewarding part of the process
go on!
MOVE!!

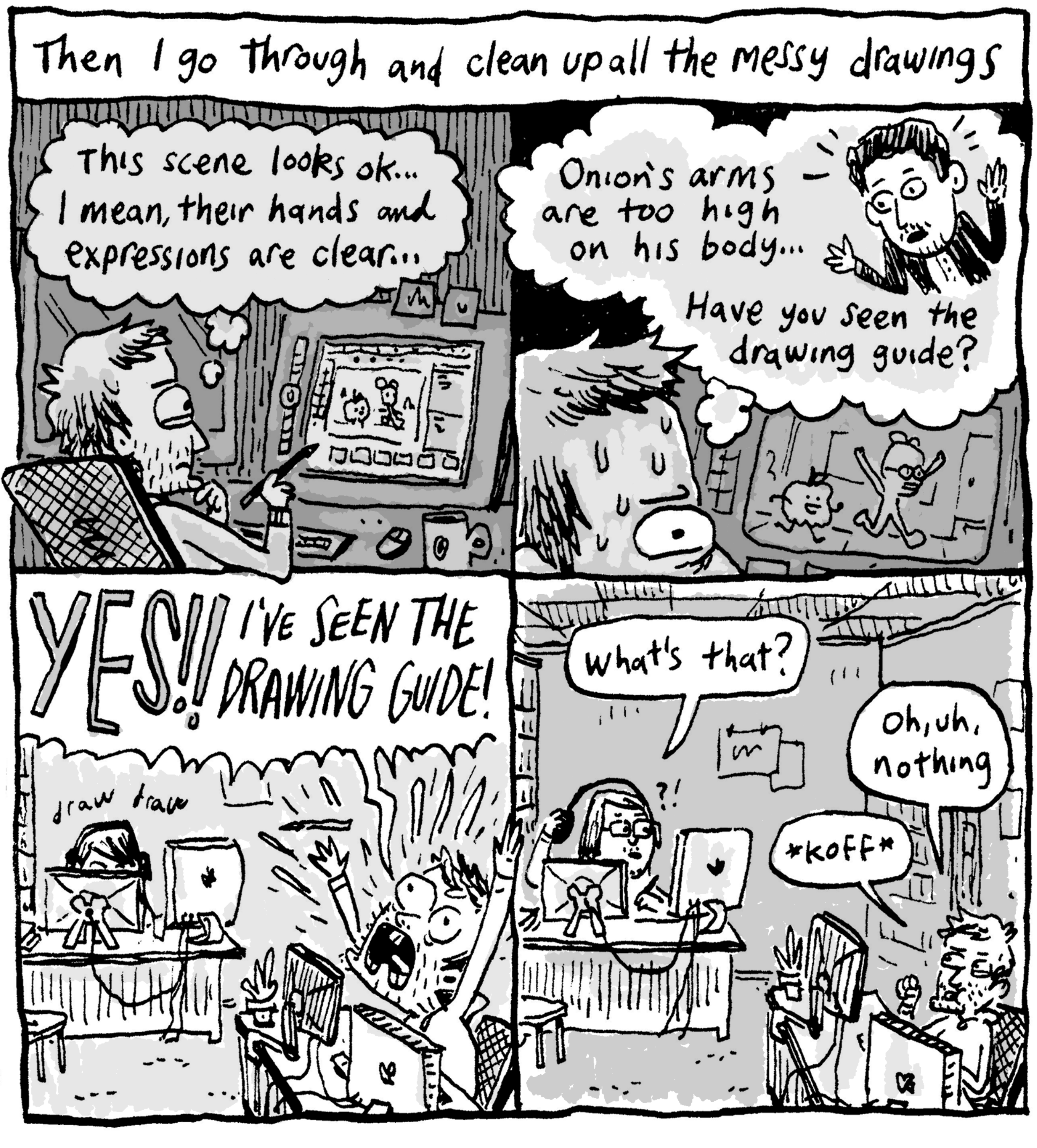

THURSDAY of WEEK 4
the CREW pitch!
This is when we present our episode to the entire crew!!!
"Let's collect the gold or something"
tap tap
ha ha ha ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha ha
omg Sam is so funny
and smart too
ha ha

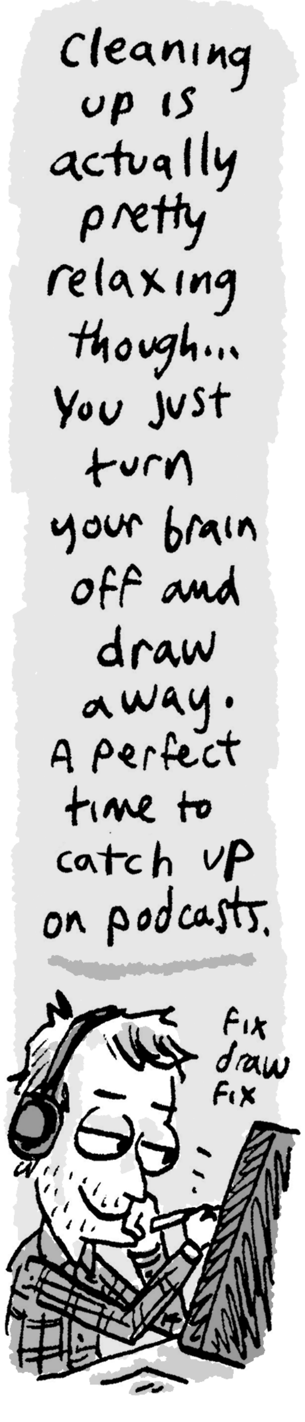

Afterwards, there's another note session with George and the directors, which ideally should be much shorter than the last, but not always, as this is the last time they get to make changes before we hand the episode in. Joke and Story punch-ups and some more drawing finessing ensues!
their mad eyebrows should be straight, not pointing down
have you seen the drawing guide?
NO
yes
post-it note


And with that, No more pitching this episode!
we got some good laughs!
Yeah! your ending was incredible


That Friday I can't do ANYTHING. Even though there's new notes and LOTS of drawing clean up to do, it's hard not to feel like this episode is done.
But it's not! there's still a week left... onto
WEEK FIVE!

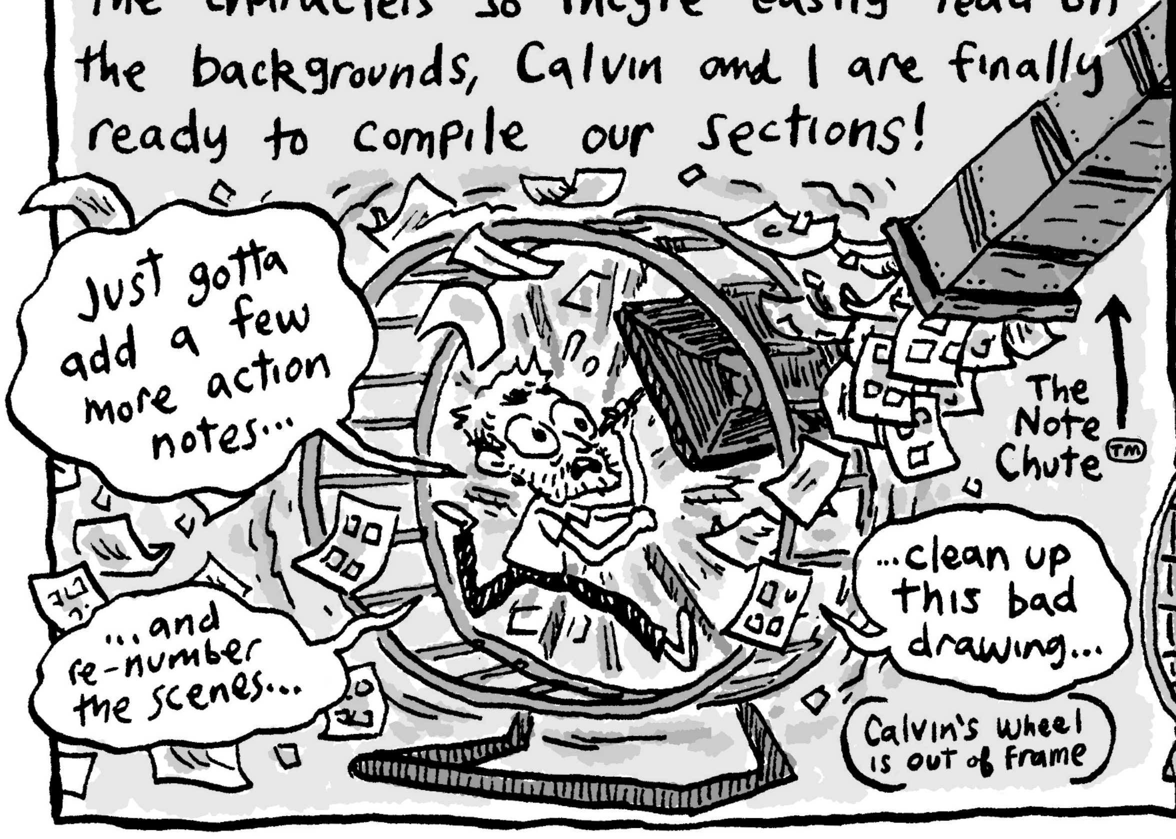

One last rally to get through the FINAL pile of NOTES!
AHH!! I can't believe I have to re-do this scene AGAIN!
Focus!
Just do it!


Then I go through and clean up all the messy drawings
This scene looks ok... I mean, their hands and expressions are clear...
Onion's arms are too high on his body...
Have you seen the drawing guide?
YES!! I'VE SEEN THE DRAWING GUIDE!
draw draw
What's that?
?!
Oh, uh, nothing
koff

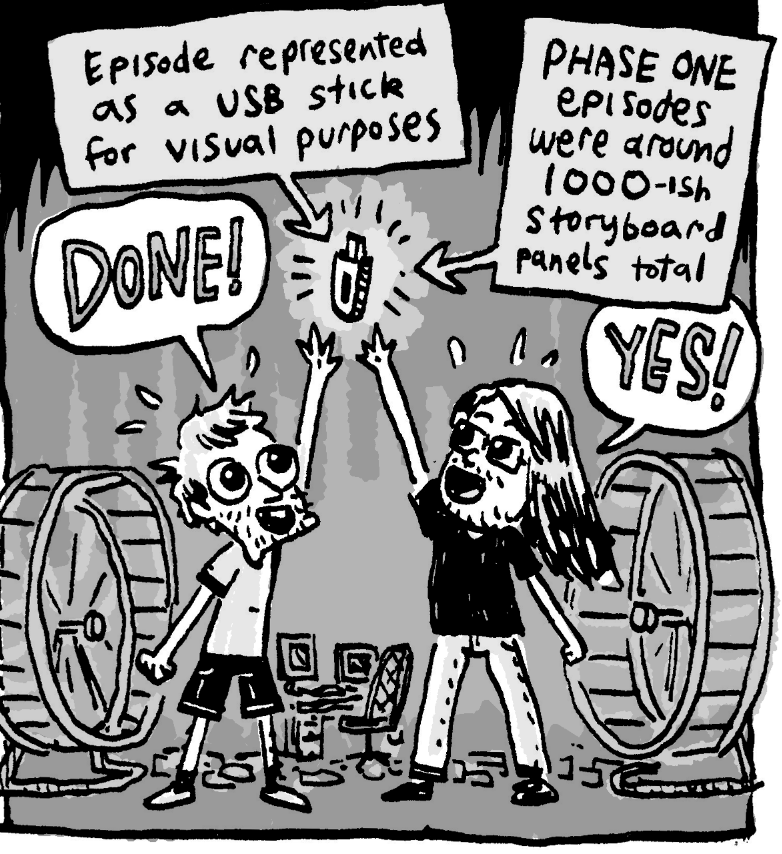

Cleaning up is actually pretty relaxing though... You just turn your brain off and draw away. A perfect time to catch up on podcasts.
Fix draw Fix

Sold to krvaldez1357@gmail.com

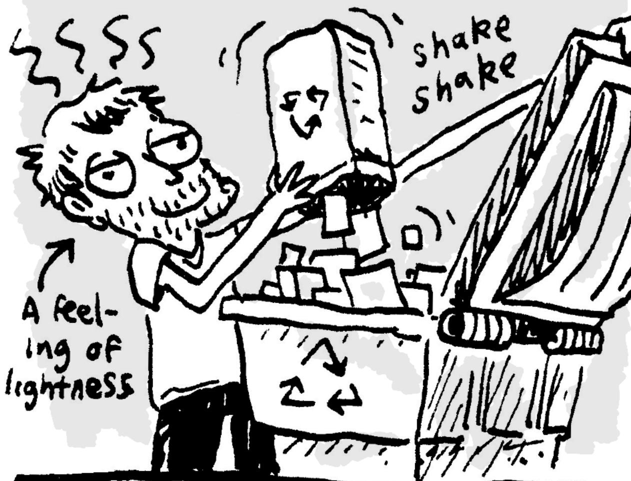
With some finishing touches, like making sure the dialogue and action notes are typed in correctly and adding a white layer under the characters so they're easily read on the backgrounds, Calvin and I are finally ready to compile our sections!


Just gotta add a few more action notes...
...and re-number the scenes...
...clean up this bad drawing...
The Note Chute™
Calvin's wheel is out of frame

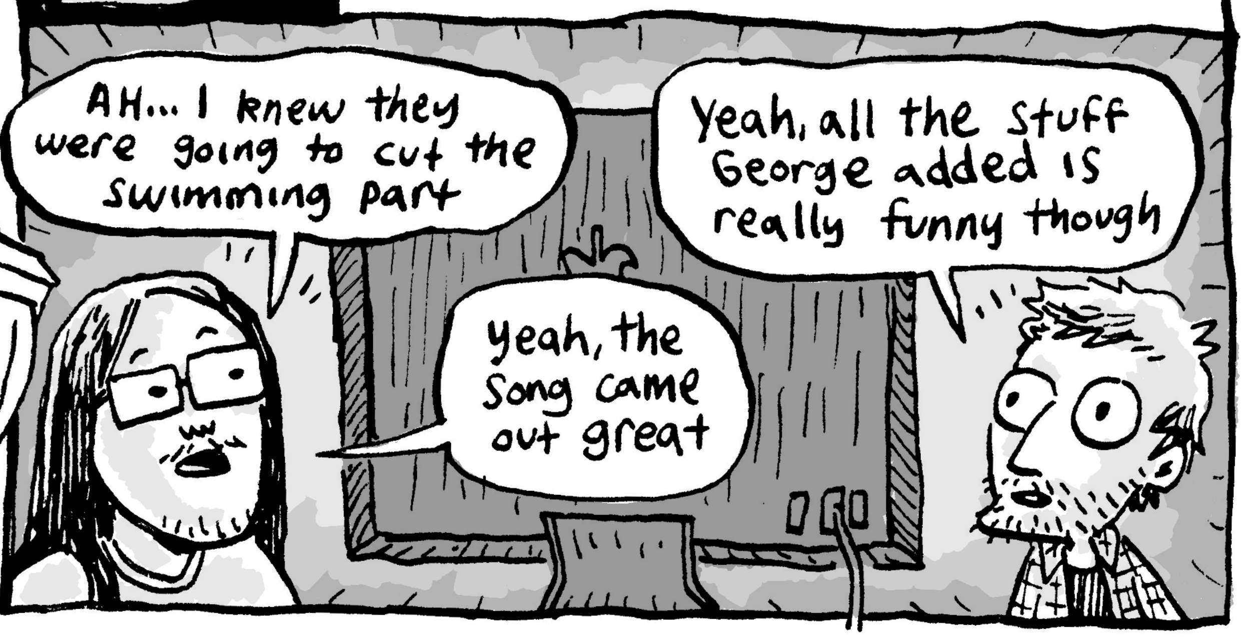
After **FIVE WEEKS** of consistent work, we **HAND IN OUR EPISODE!**


Episode represented as a USB stick for visual purposes
PHASE ONE episodes were around 1000-ish storyboard panels total
DONE!
YES!

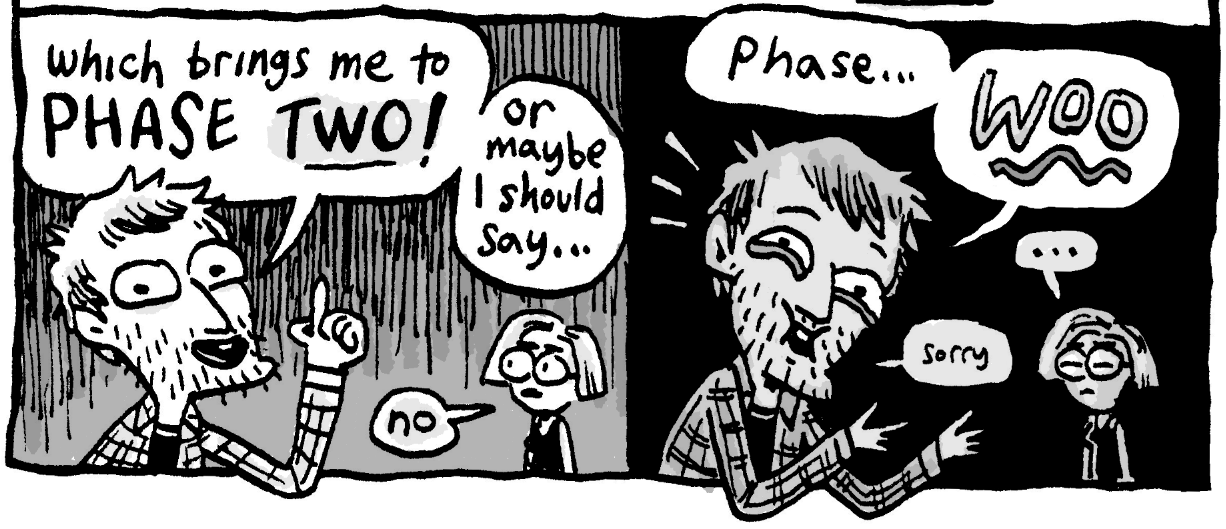
Before I leave for the weekend I like to clean up my desk/work space (and computer desktop!) for a fresh start on Monday


shake shake
A feeling of lightness

AND SO: That episode's animatic is posted a few weeks later:

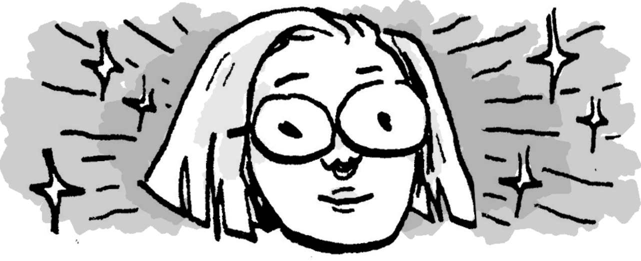

AH... I knew they were going to cut the swimming part
Yeah, all the stuff George added is really funny though
yeah, the song came out great

Regardless of what we put into each episode, George would always go in and add his special touches in the animatic stage to really make the episodes **POP.** His small dialogue ad-libs, funny line reads and sound design is the essence that makes A&O... A&O, y'know?

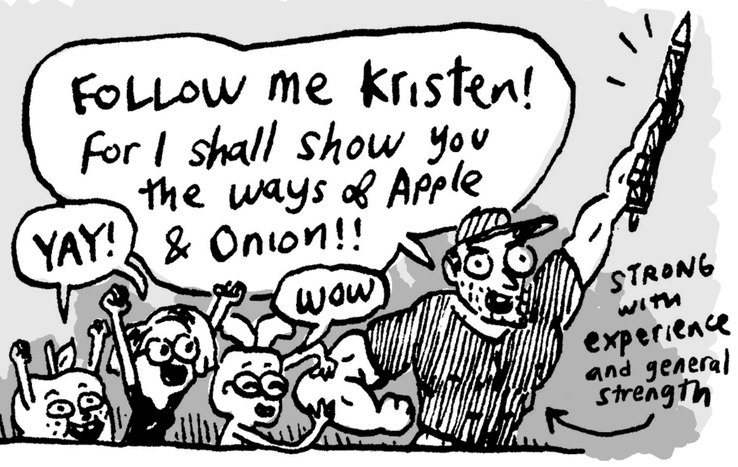

Which brings me to PHASE TWO!
or maybe I should say...
no
Phase... WOO
sorry
...

PHASE TWO

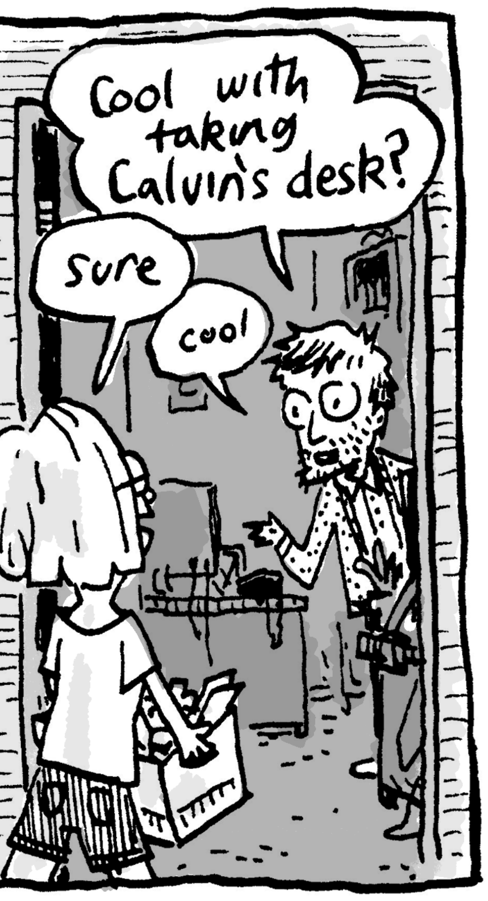
Between seasons, Calvin went back to Close Enough to be a supervisor (nice), so the current Apple & Onion revisionist, **KRISTEN WOO**, was moved up to being a storyboard artist and my *NEW PARTNER*!



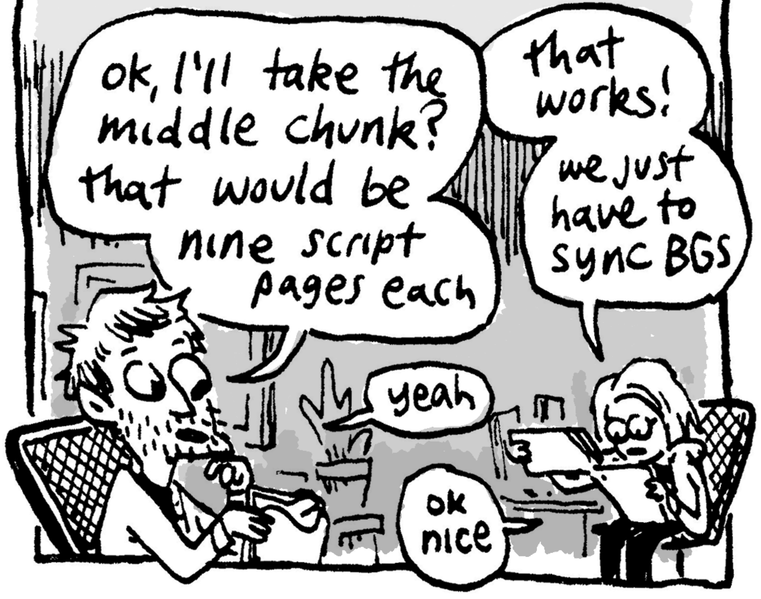
I was mostly following Calvin's lead on our episodes together, as he was on the show longer than me and is a more experienced board artist in general. But now, with a handful of A&O episodes under my belt and a new partner, I felt like this was my time to SHINE!

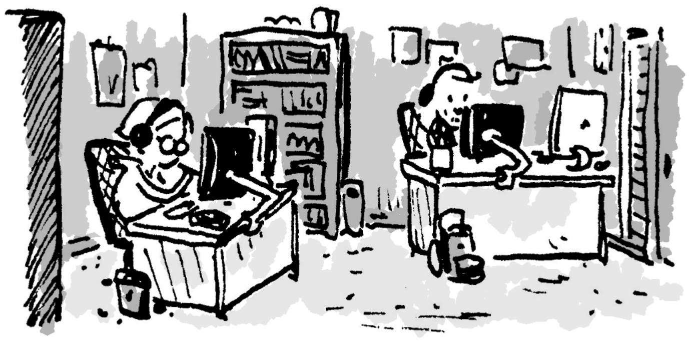

Follow me Kristen! For I shall show you the ways of Apple & Onion!!
YAY!
WOW
STRONG with experience and general strength

SIKE. In reality, Kristen started on A&O around the same time I did, and since her job was **LITERALLY** cleaning up and fixing my wonky drawings, she already had a firm grasp of the many technical rules on this show that tripped me up when I started.

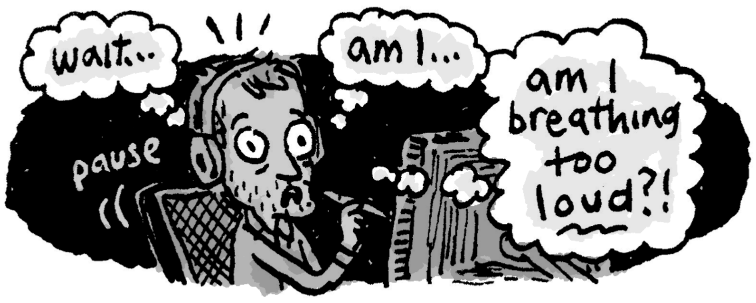

Cool with taking Calvin's desk?
sure
cool

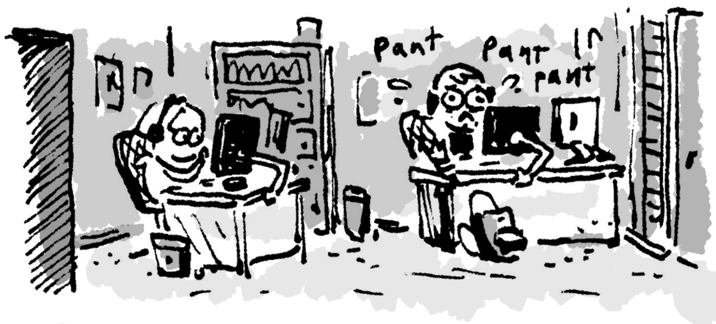
So it was a super easy transition, and since A&O is scripted, there isn't a ton of collaboration involved.


ok, I'll take the middle chunk? that would be nine script pages each
that works!
we just have to sync BGS
yeah
ok nice



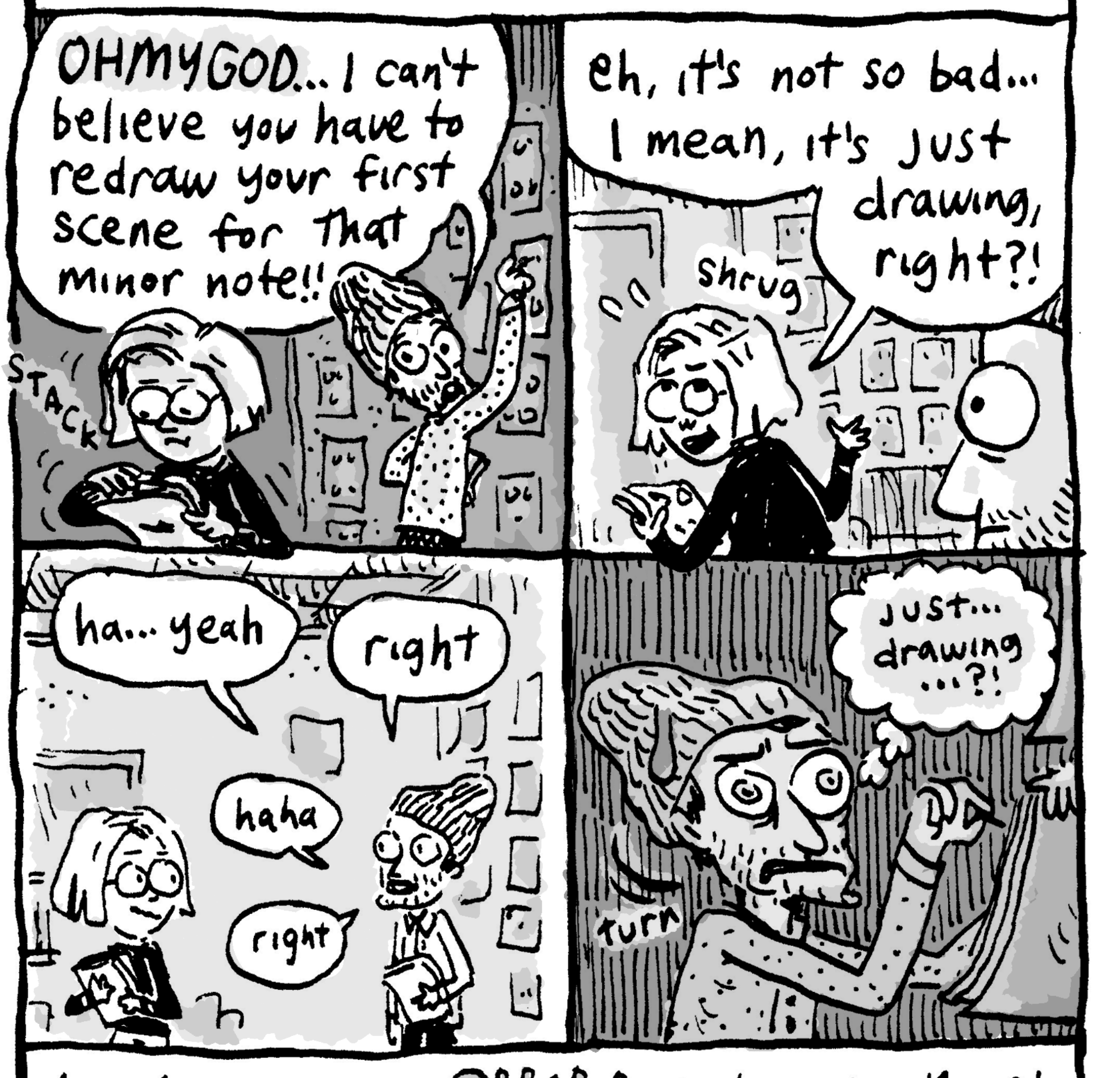
The "Partnership" aspect is a weird part about being a board artist... Spending 8 hours a day with someone you don't know in a small, windowless room can be anxiety inducing at first!


wait...
am I...
am I breathing too loud?!
pause

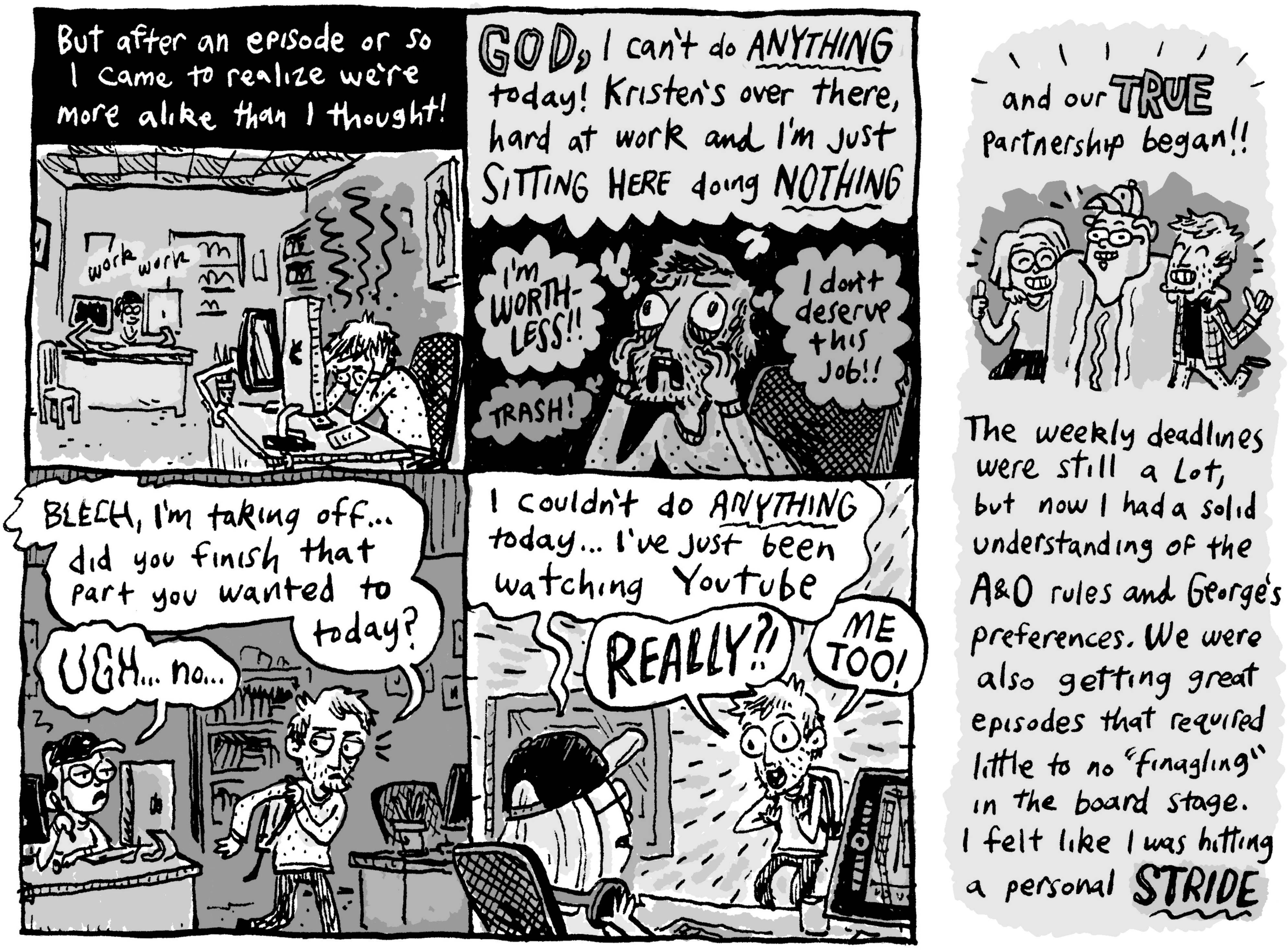

pant
pant
pant

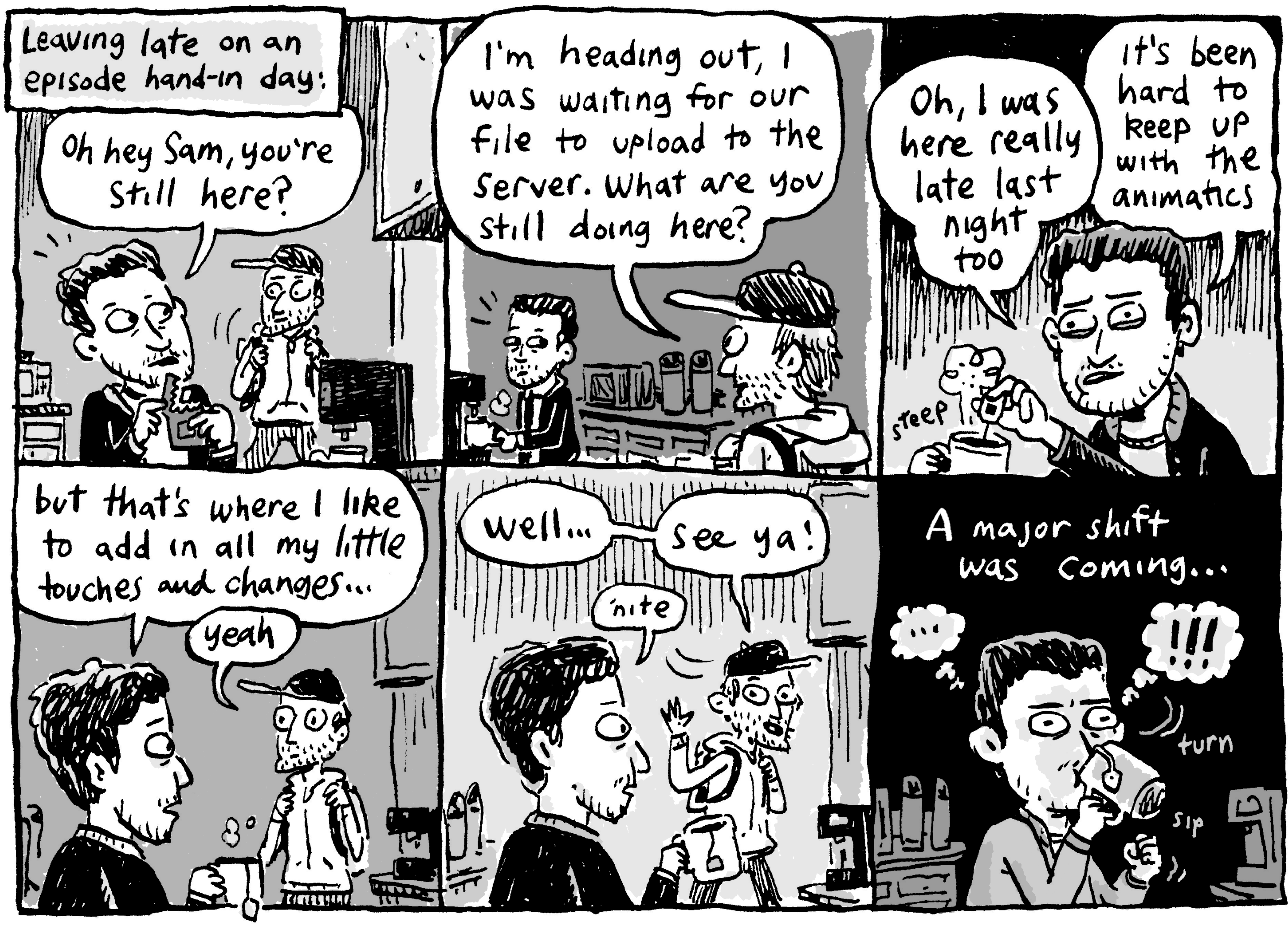
"Room VIBE" is an important factor in making good work.

In the beginning it honestly felt like me and Kristen were **ENTIRELY** different people. One thing about me is that I'm a **HEAVY** complainer, it's who I am. It's my way of alleviating work stress!


OHMYGOD... I can't believe you have to redraw your first scene for that minor note!!
STACK
eh, it's not so bad... I mean, it's just drawing, right?!
shrug
ha... yeah
right
haha
right
just... drawing...?!
turn

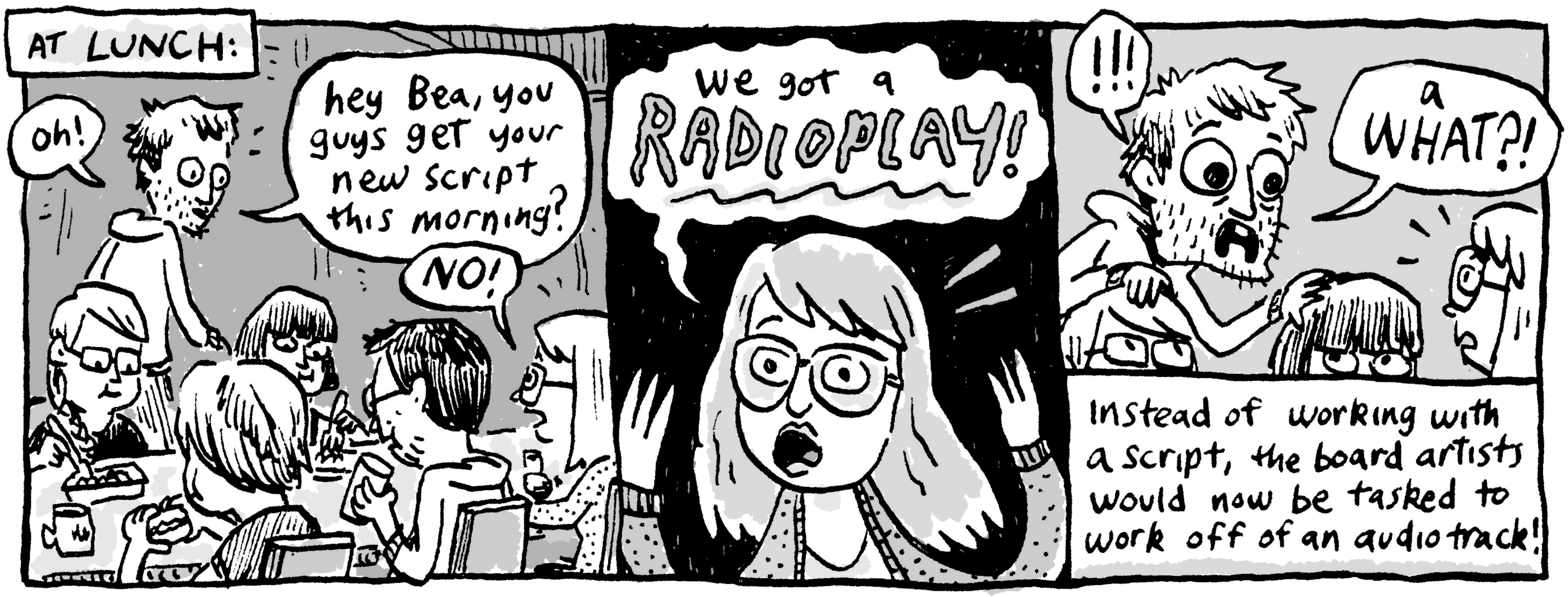
Kristen was so **CHILL** about everything!


But after an episode or so I came to realize we're more alike than I thought!
work work
GOD, I can't do ANYTHING today! Kristen's over there, hard at work and I'm just SITTING HERE doing NOTHING
I'm WORTHLESS!!
I don't deserve this job!!
TRASH!
and our TRUE partnership began!!
The weekly deadlines were still a lot, but now I had a solid understanding of the A&O rules and George's preferences. We were also getting great episodes that required little to no "finagling" in the board stage. I felt like I was hitting a personal STRIDE
BLECH, I'm taking off... did you finish that part you wanted to today?
UGH... no...
I couldn't do ANYTHING today... I've just been watching YouTube
REALLY?!
ME TOO!


Leaving late on an episode hand-in day:
Oh hey Sam, you're still here?
I'm heading out, I was waiting for our file to upload to the server. What are you still doing here?
Oh, I was here really late last night too
it's been hard to keep up with the animatics
steep
but that's where I like to add in all my little touches and changes...
yeah
well...
see ya!
'nite
A major shift was coming...
...
!!!
turn
sip

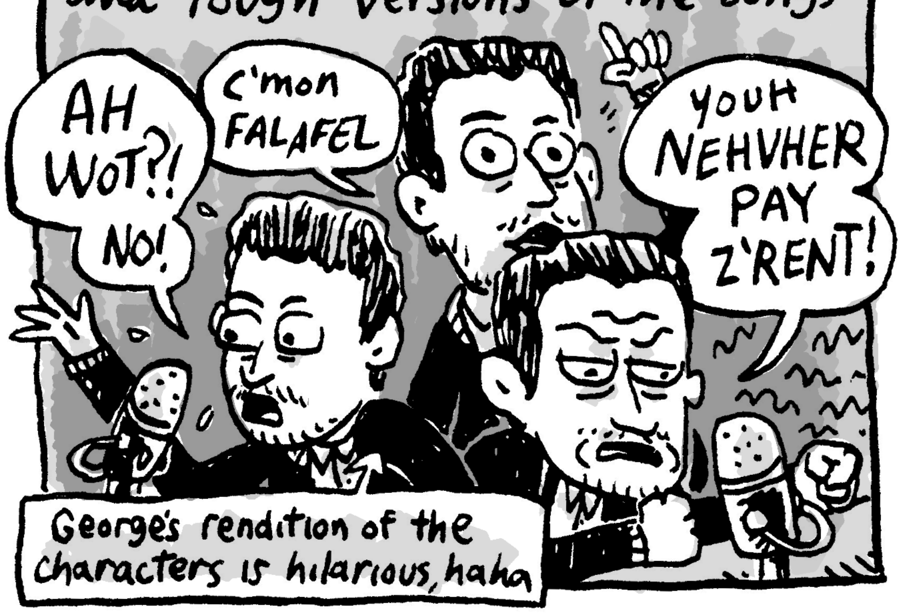
Doing so much post-storyboard work was taking a toll on George and everyone else down the pipeline, so they came up with a way to sprinkle in as much "GEORGE MAGIC" as possible BEFORE the boarding stage...

AT LUNCH:


oh!
hey Bea, you guys get your new script this morning?
NO!
We got a RADIOPLAY!
!!!
a WHAT?!

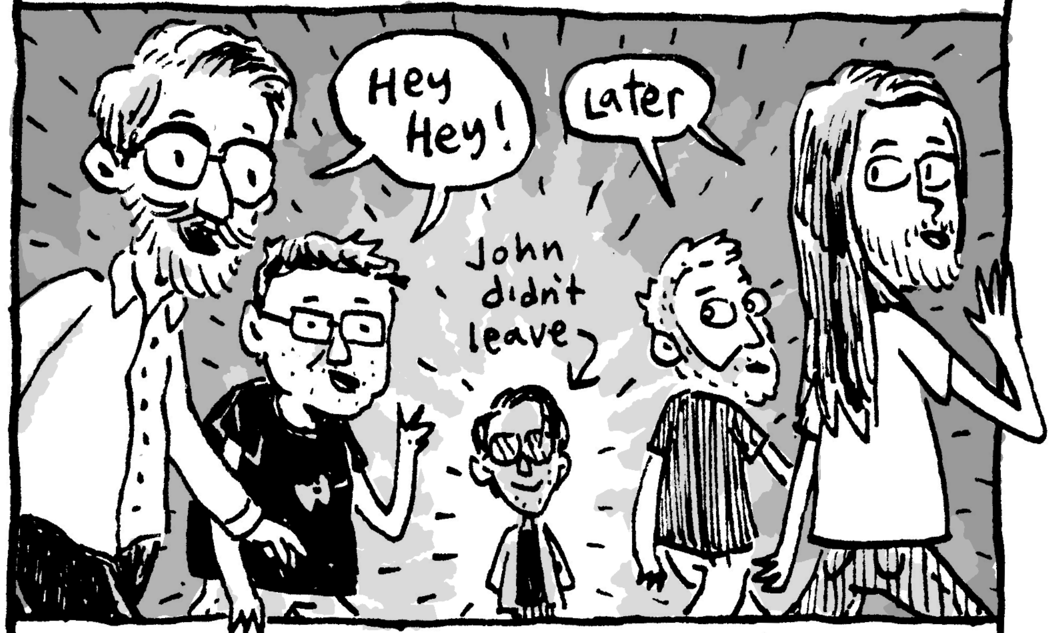
Instead of working with a script, the board artists would now be tasked to work off of an audio track!

The audio track is a read-through of the script by George, complete with placeholder sound effects and rough versions of the songs


AH WOT?! NO!
C'mon FALAFEL
youH NEHVHER PAY Z'RENT!

George's rendition of the characters is hilarious, haha

There were a couple other big shifts happening too... the directors changed!


Hey Hey!
Later
John didn't leave

Bryan + Chuck replaced David + Sean

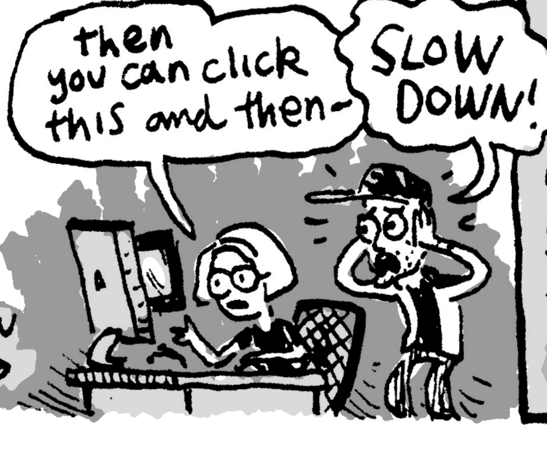
And our Schedule changed as well. Now it looked like THIS:

	S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
WEEK ONE	▨	①					▨
WEEK TWO	▨			②			▨
WEEK THREE	▨		③				▨
WEEK FOUR	▨				④		▨
WEEK FIVE	▨					⑤	▨

① EPISODE HANDOUT

② "STAGING" PASS
③ DIRECTOR CHECK-IN

④ CREW PITCH
⑤ EPISODE HAND-IN


then you can click this and then-
SLOW DOWN!

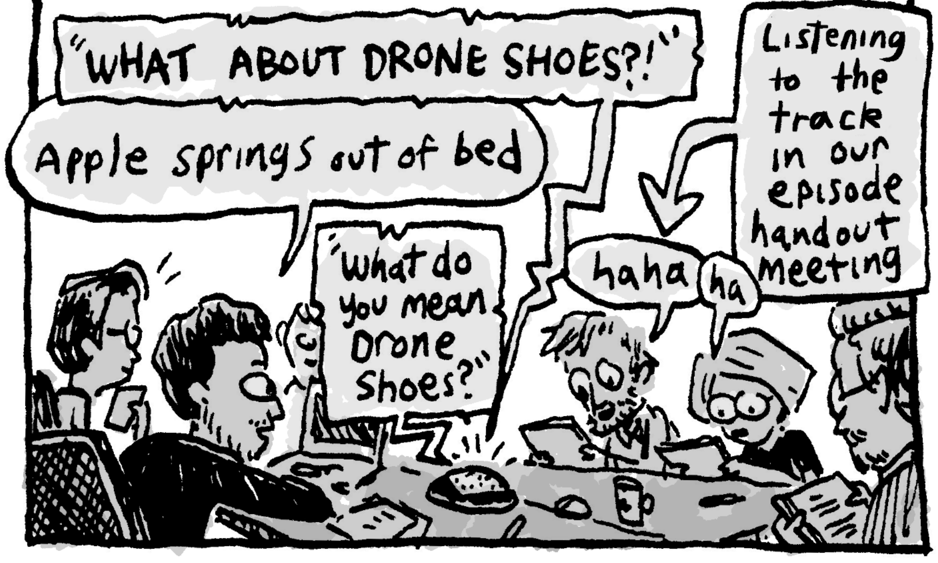
kristen teaching me how to use timeline view in Storyboard pro →

Our staging pass got pushed a day and pretty much became our Thumbnail pitch, as it now included George so we can get his notes early. Our Third week pitch turned into a check-in, just to make sure we were on the right track.

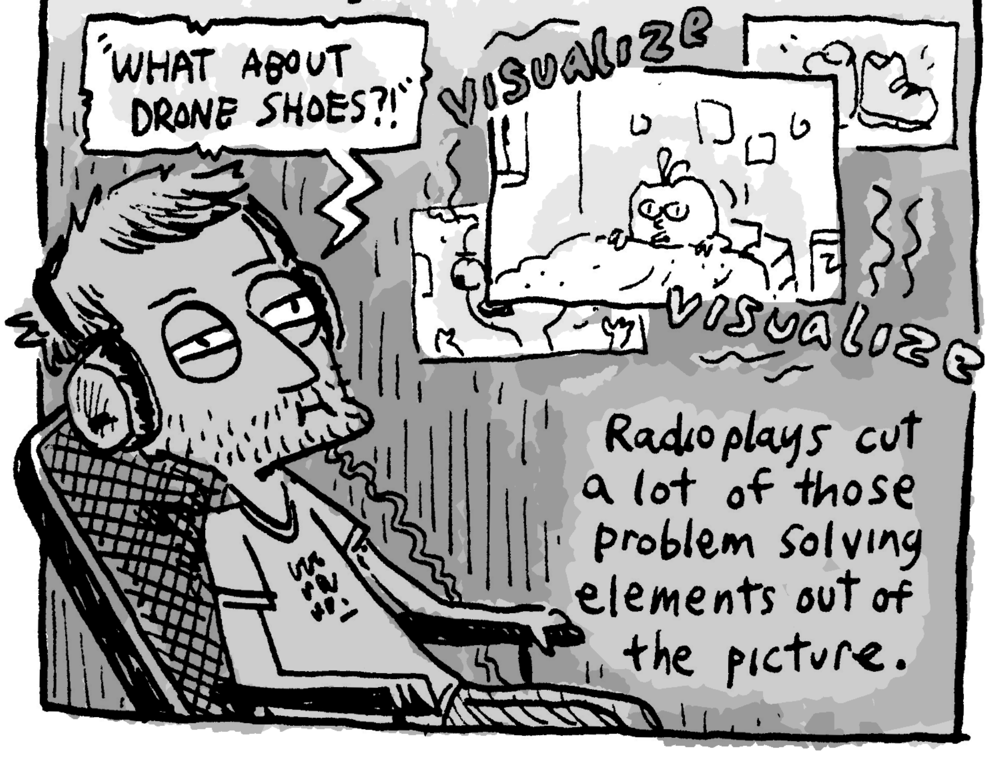
MAKES SENSE!

Sold to krvaldez1357@gmail.com

Radioplays pretty much **ELIMINATED** most of the story notes we would get in our pitches and took the guesswork out of how dialogue lines should be acted/drawn out. ALSO, long scripts were a thing of the past now that they were so heavily scrutinized and recorded to episode time by George before we even got our hands on it! All in all, it was a positive change for the show from a production standpoint.

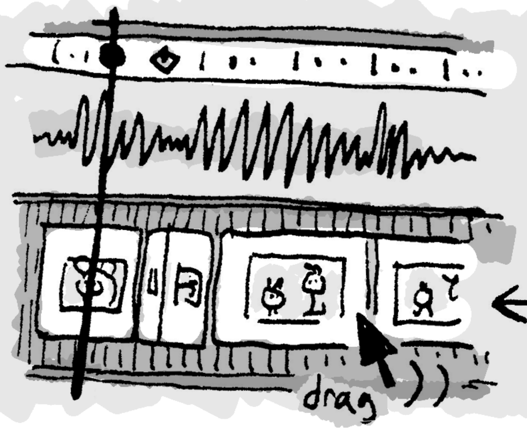

"WHAT ABOUT DRONE SHOES?!"
Apple springs out of bed
Listening to the track in our episode handout meeting
"What do you mean Drone Shoes?"
haha
ha

BUT, the part of storyboarding that I enjoy the most is the **STORYTELLING** aspect... it's a fun, creative challenge to dive into a story and figure out the best way to visually tell it while punching up jokes and adding "Funny stuff" wherever it fits. It's mentally taxing but very satisfying when you finally crack your episode!


"WHAT ABOUT DRONE SHOES?!"
VISUALIZE
VISUALIZE

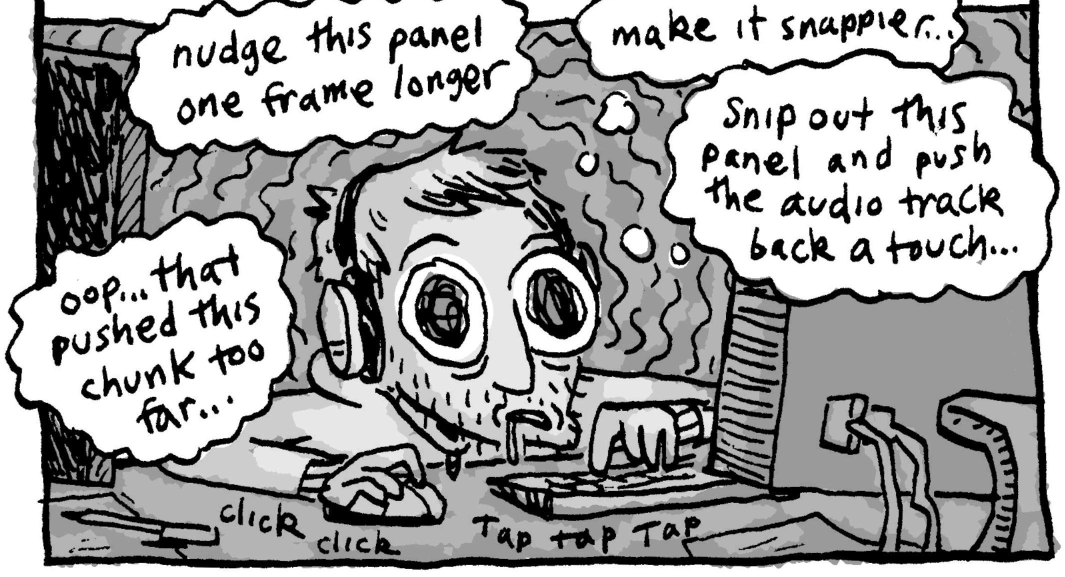
Radioplays cut a lot of those problem solving elements out of the picture.

Still, drawing the boards is no small feat, and all the time and energy we would've spent on "figuring out" the episode is diverted to adding even more acting poses and to actually TIME our boards to the audio track



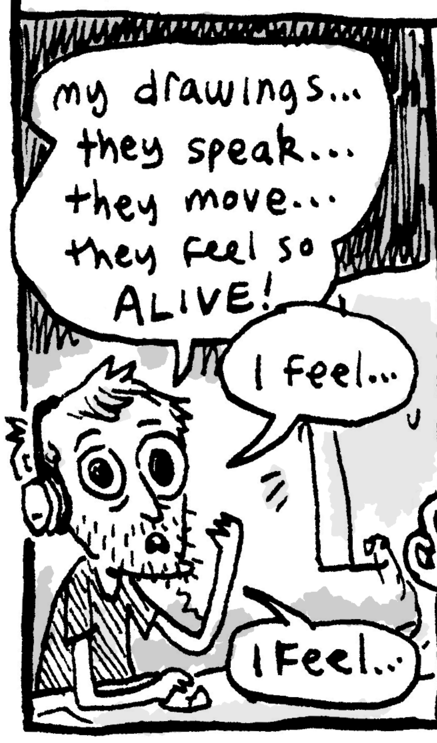
That entails manually adjusting the length of each panel to sync with the audio track.

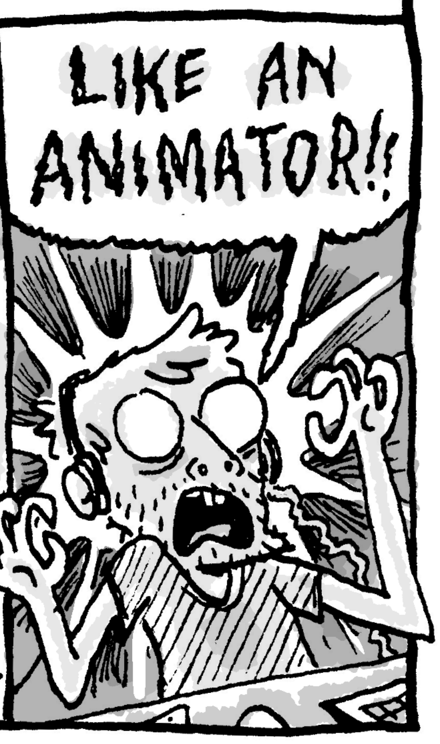
After I got the hang of it I found that timing isn't necessarily hard, just tedious (at least the simplified way we were doing it), but it's easy to get sucked into a trance and noodle around until everything is timed juuust right...


nudge this panel one frame longer
make it snappier...
Snip out this panel and push the audio track back a touch...
oop... that pushed this chunk too far...
click click
Tap tap Tap

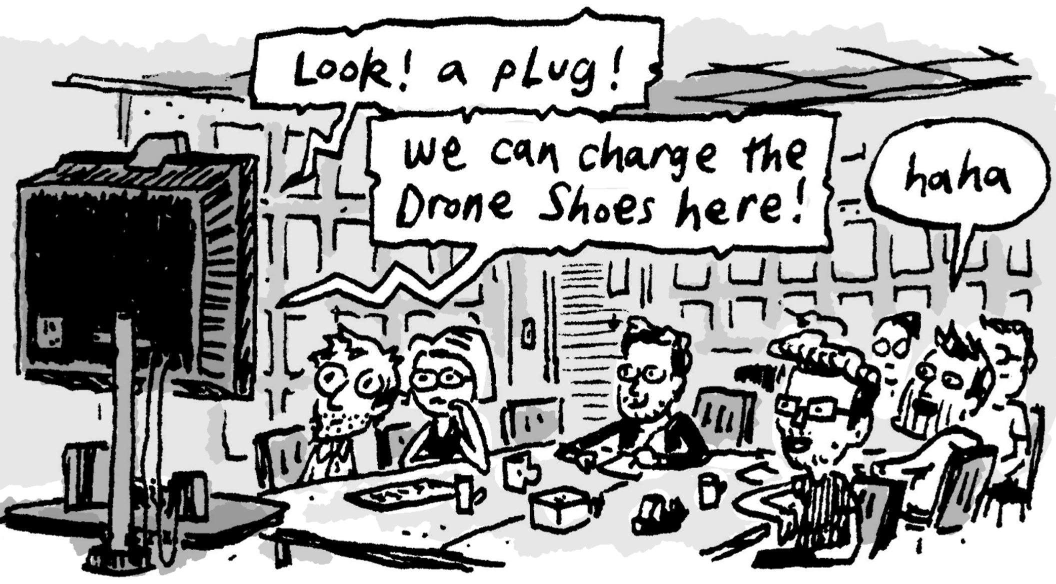
Then you just sit back, press play, and watch your drawings

MOVE

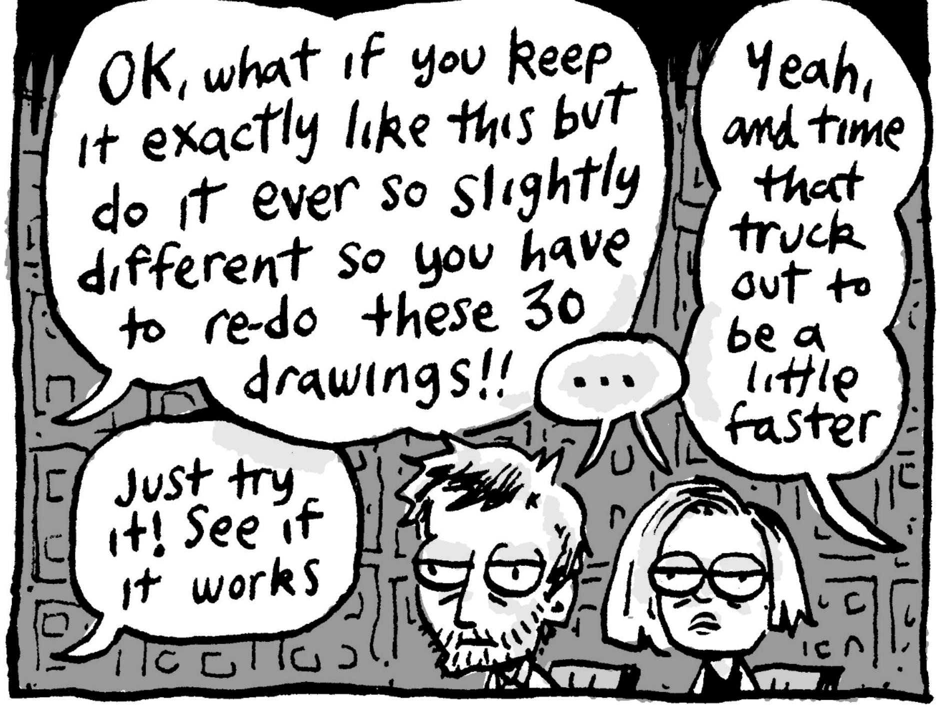

my drawings... they speak... they move... they feel so ALIVE!
I feel...
I Feel...


LIKE AN ANIMATOR!!

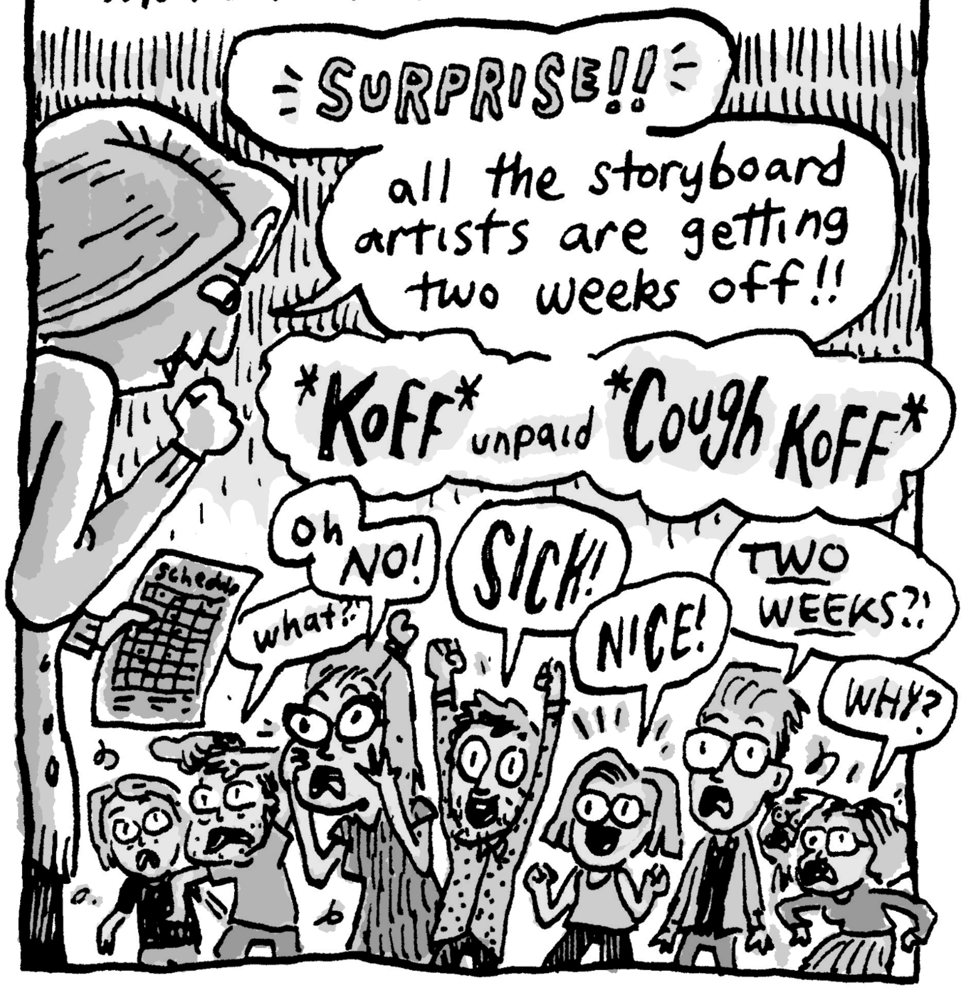
While the instant gratification of the timing process could be thrilling, presenting animatics at pitches was decidedly less engaging than the standard, old way of acting out our boards.


Look! a plug!
we can charge the Drone Shoes here!
haha

And since the story was already so solid, the notes process felt less like a collaborative discussion on how we could improve the episode and turned more into, well... a notes session. Without story notes to give, the notes became a lot more TECHNICAL.

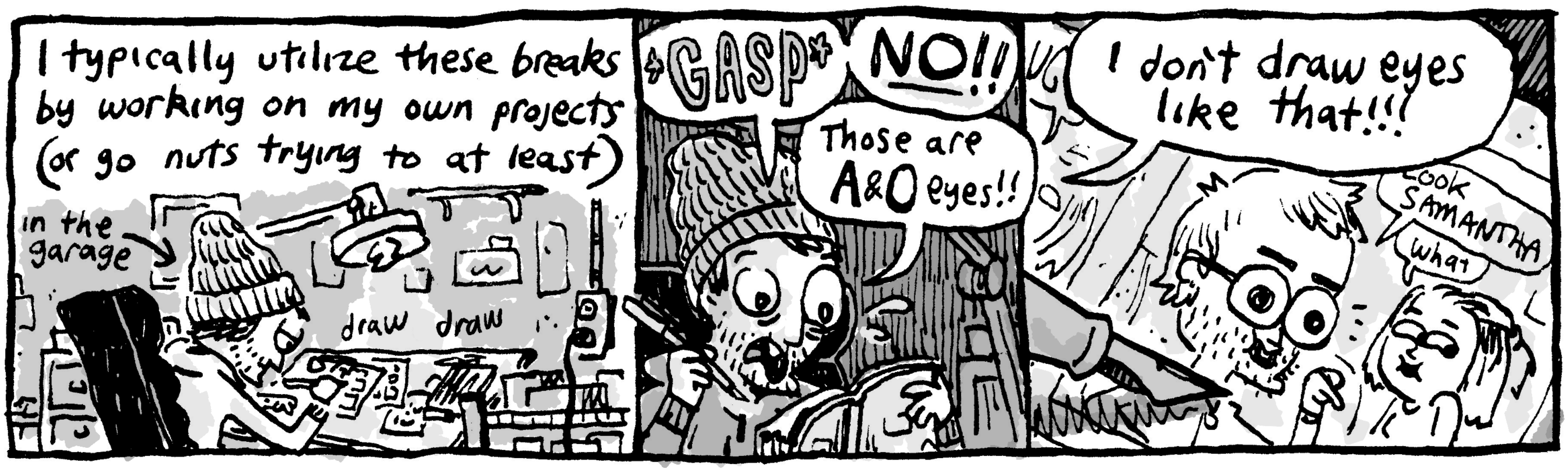

OK, what if you keep it exactly like this but do it ever so slightly different so you have to re-do these 30 drawings!!
Yeah, and time that truck out to be a little faster
...
Just try it! See if it works

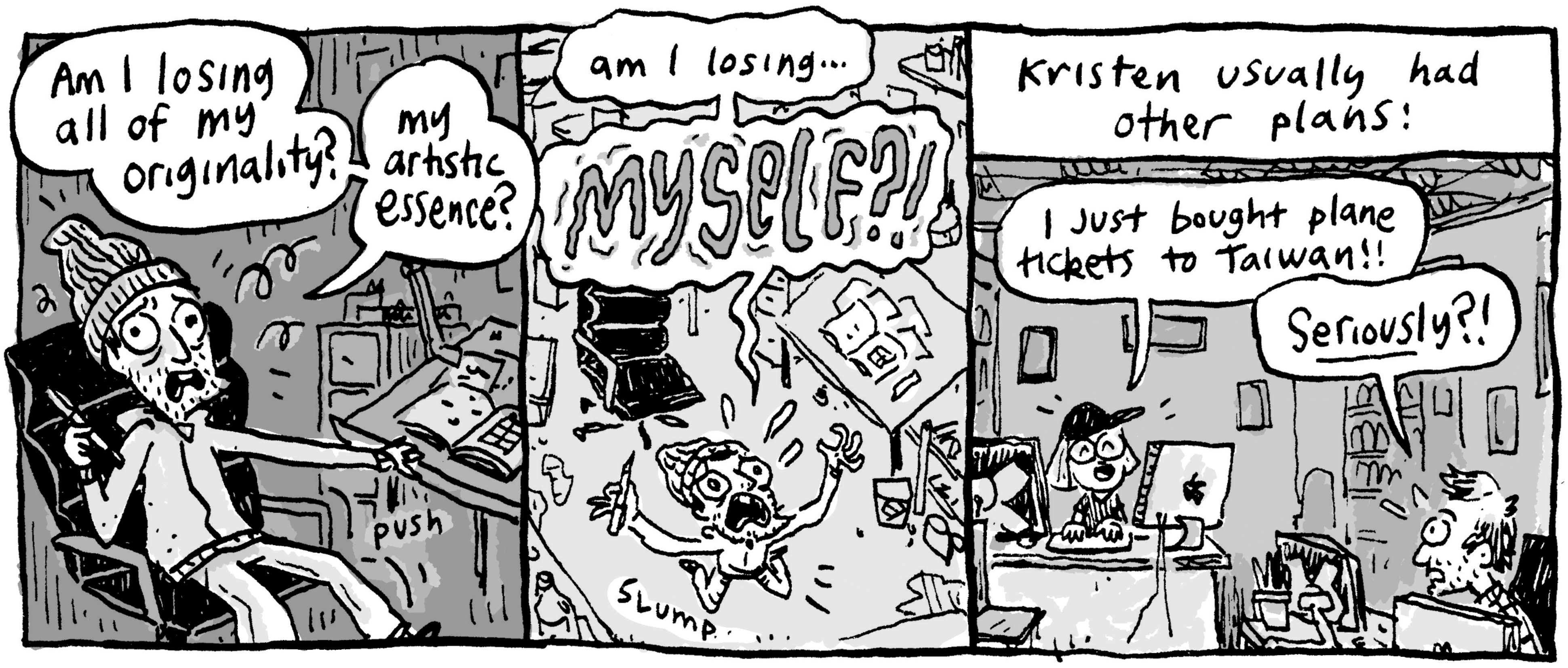
The radio play transition did cause a few hiccups production-wise, which revealed something else me and Kristen have a mutual fondness for...


SURPRISE!!
all the storyboard artists are getting two weeks off!!
KOFF unpaid *Cough KOFF*
Schedule
Oh NO!
what?!
SICK!
NICE!
TWO WEEKS?!
WHY?
a
b

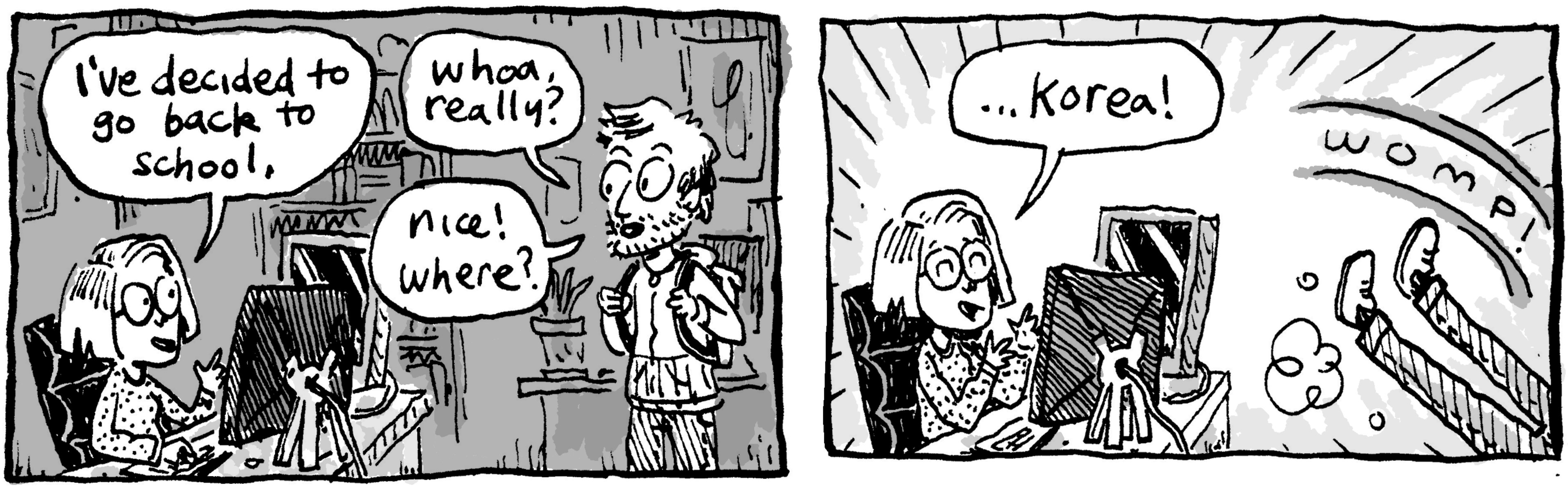
A lot of my peers hate it, like the ones with kids/responsibilities, but to me, one of the sweetest perks of working in animation is the unexpected short breaks from working in animation! Sure, it's unpaid, but boarding is so draining, it's almost a necessity to get time to recharge your creative juices every once and a while...

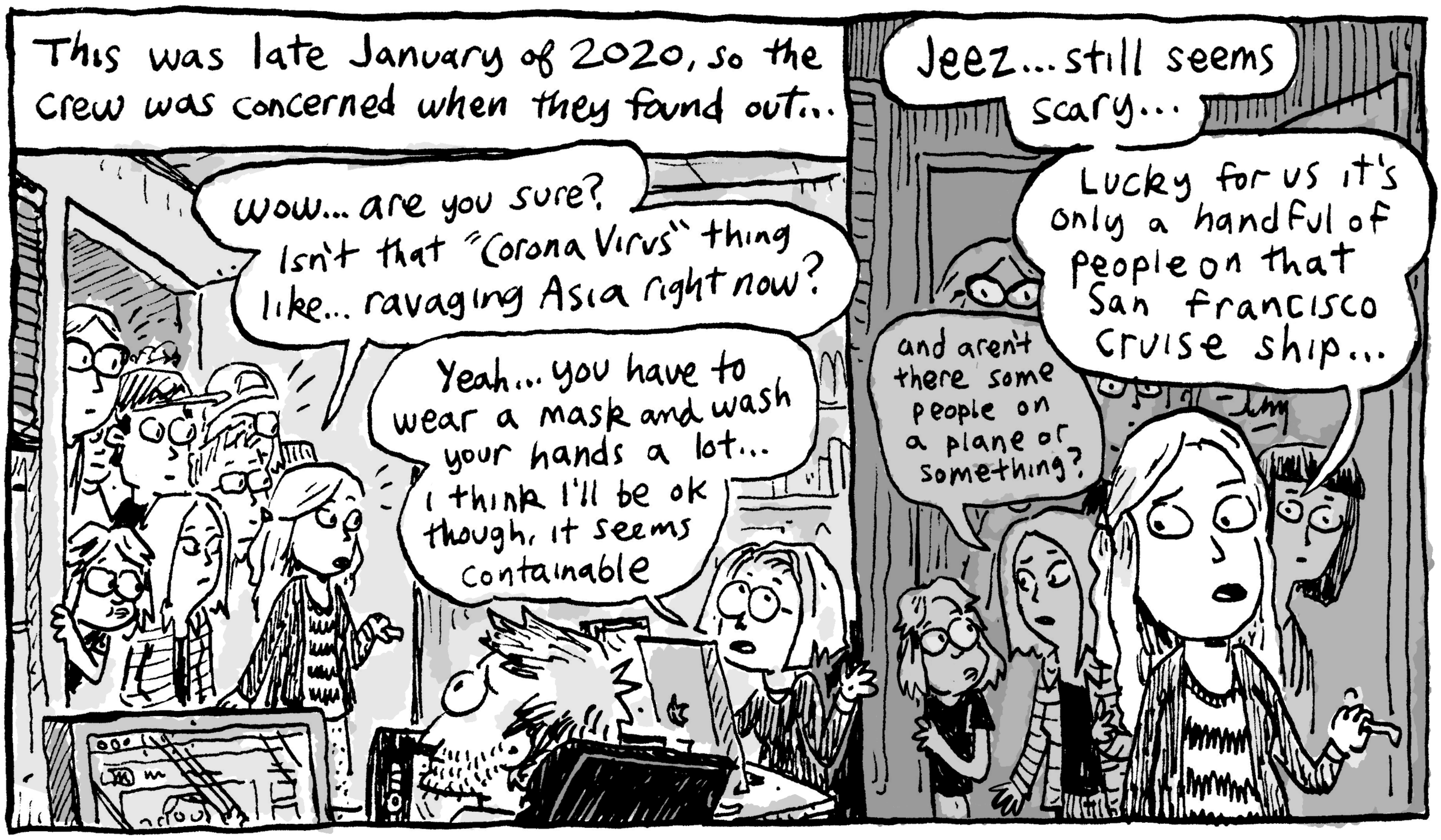
I typically utilize these breaks by working on my own projects (or go nuts trying to at least)

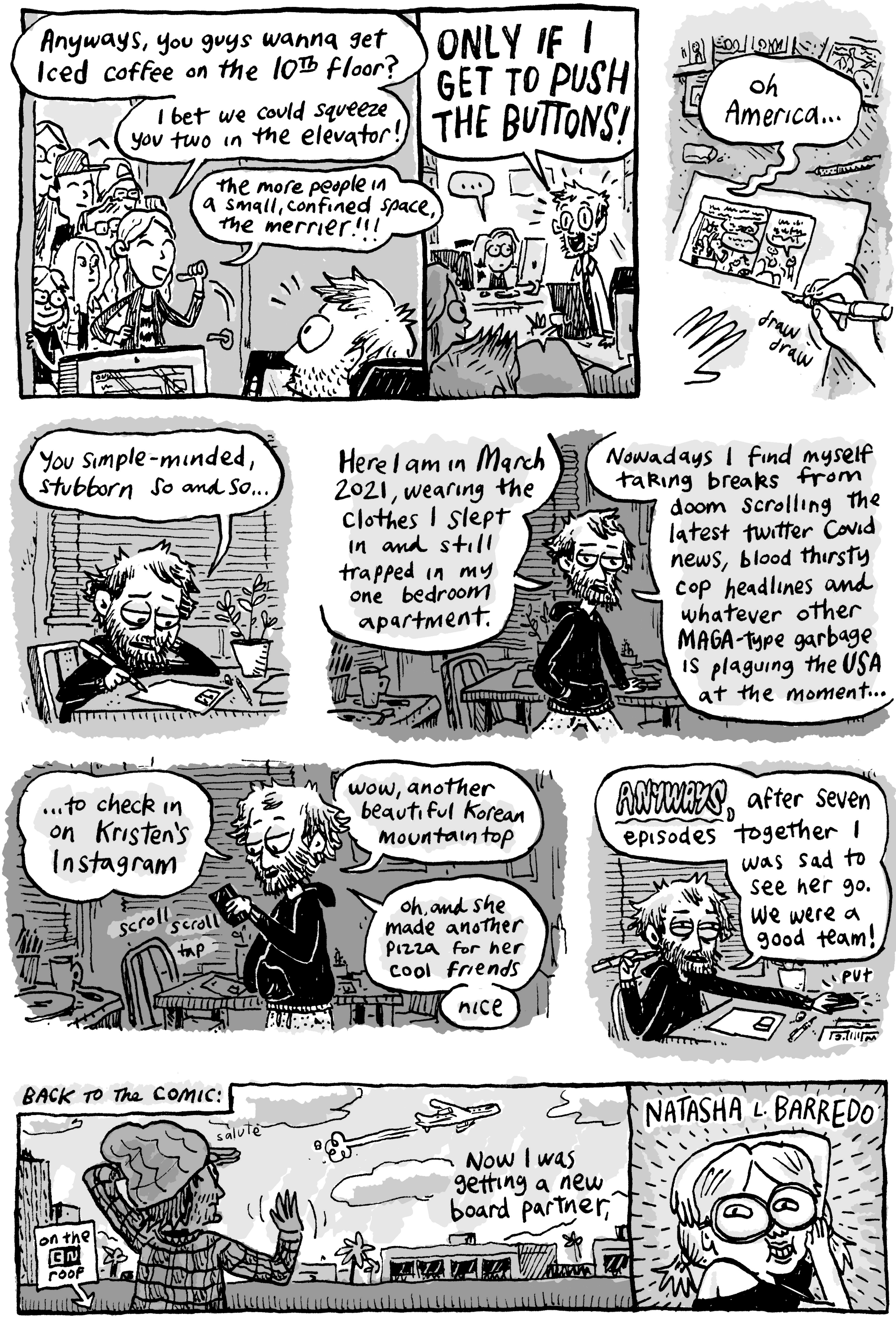

in the garage
draw draw
GASP
NO!!
Those are A&O eyes!!
I don't draw eyes like that!!!
LOOK SAMANTHA
What


Am I losing all of my originality?
my artistic essence?
push
am I losing...
MYSELF?!
SLUMP
Kristen usually had other plans:
I just bought plane tickets to Taiwan!!
Seriously?!

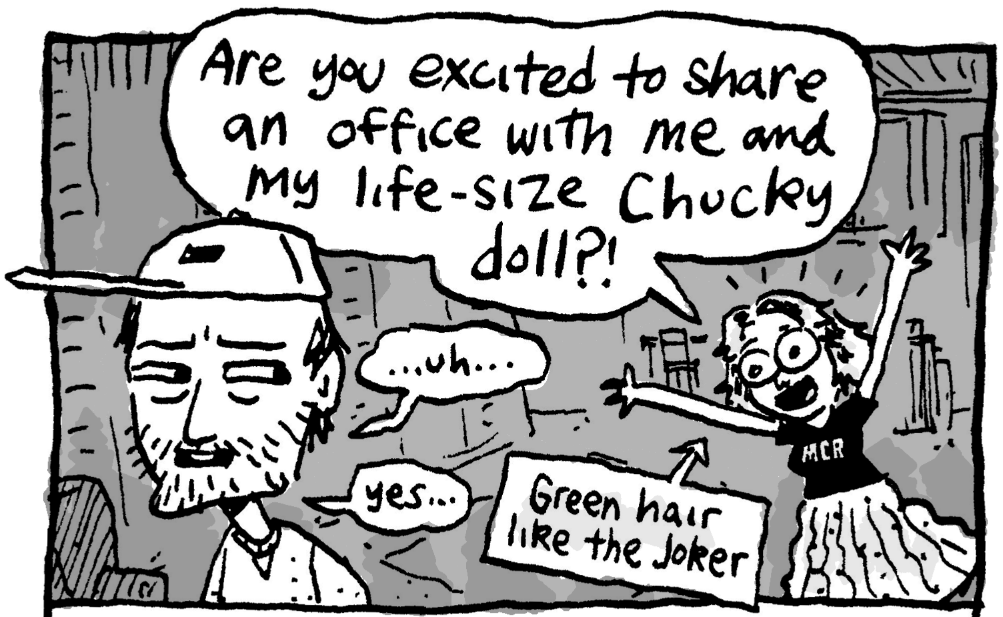
She was always traveling, which I at first associated with a "Go with the Flow" attitude, but later realized she's a meticulous planner who just happens to be super adventurous! So I shouldn't have been too surprised when she told me that she's leaving Apple & Onion...


I've decided to go back to school.
whoa, really?
nice! where?
...Korea!
WOMP!


This was late January of 2020, so the crew was concerned when they found out...
wow... are you sure? Isn't that "Corona Virus" thing like... ravaging Asia right now?
Yeah... you have to wear a mask and wash your hands a lot... I think I'll be ok though, it seems containable
Jeez... still seems scary...
Lucky for us it's only a handful of people on that San francisco cruise ship...
and aren't there some people on a plane or something?

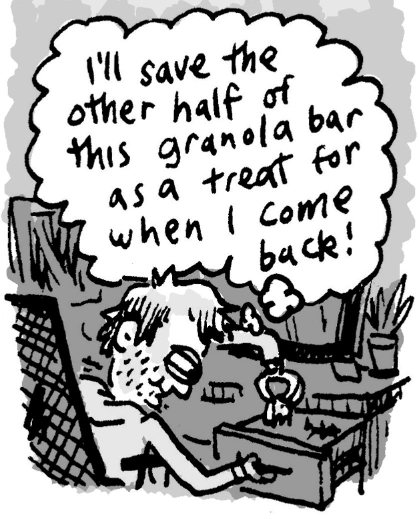

Anyways, you guys wanna get Iced coffee on the 10th floor?
I bet we could squeeze you two in the elevator!
the more people in a small, confined space, the merrier!!!
ONLY IF I GET TO PUSH THE BUTTONS!
...
oh America...
draw draw
You simple-minded, stubborn so and so...
Here I am in March 2021, wearing the clothes I slept in and still trapped in my one bedroom apartment.
Nowadays I find myself taking breaks from doom scrolling the latest twitter Covid news, blood thirsty cop headlines and whatever other MAGA-type garbage is plaguing the USA at the moment...
...to check in on Kristen's Instagram
scroll scroll tap
wow, another beautiful Korean mountaintop
oh, and she made another pizza for her cool friends
nice
ANYWAYS, after seven episodes together I was sad to see her go. We were a good team!
put
BACK TO THE COMIC:
salute
on the CN roof
Now I was getting a new board partner,
NATASHA L. BARREDO

Her partner, BRANDON WILLIAMS, had just left for a different show, and instead of hiring/training two new board artists for me and Natasha to work with, A&O decided to merge our teams together and paired us up!

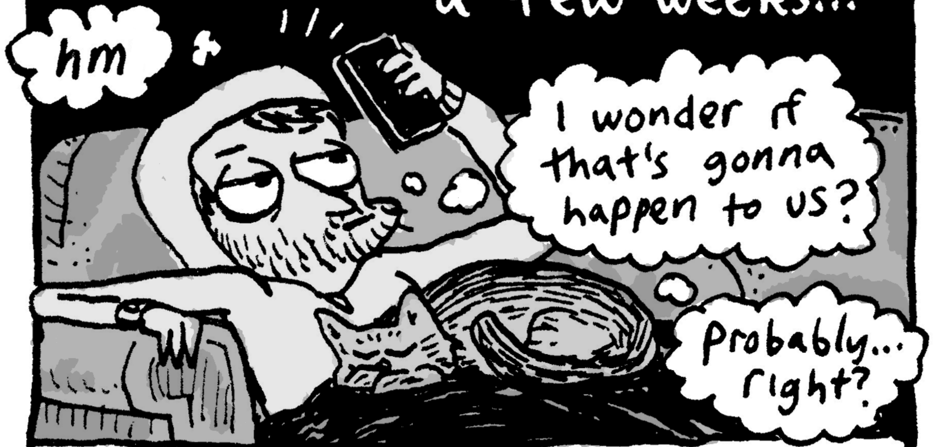

Are you excited to share an office with me and my life-size Chucky doll?!
...uh...
yes...
Green hair like the Joker
MCR

She had been on A&O way longer than me and is overall an extremely hilarious person. The episodes she did with her former partner, MAHA TABIKH were my season one faves!

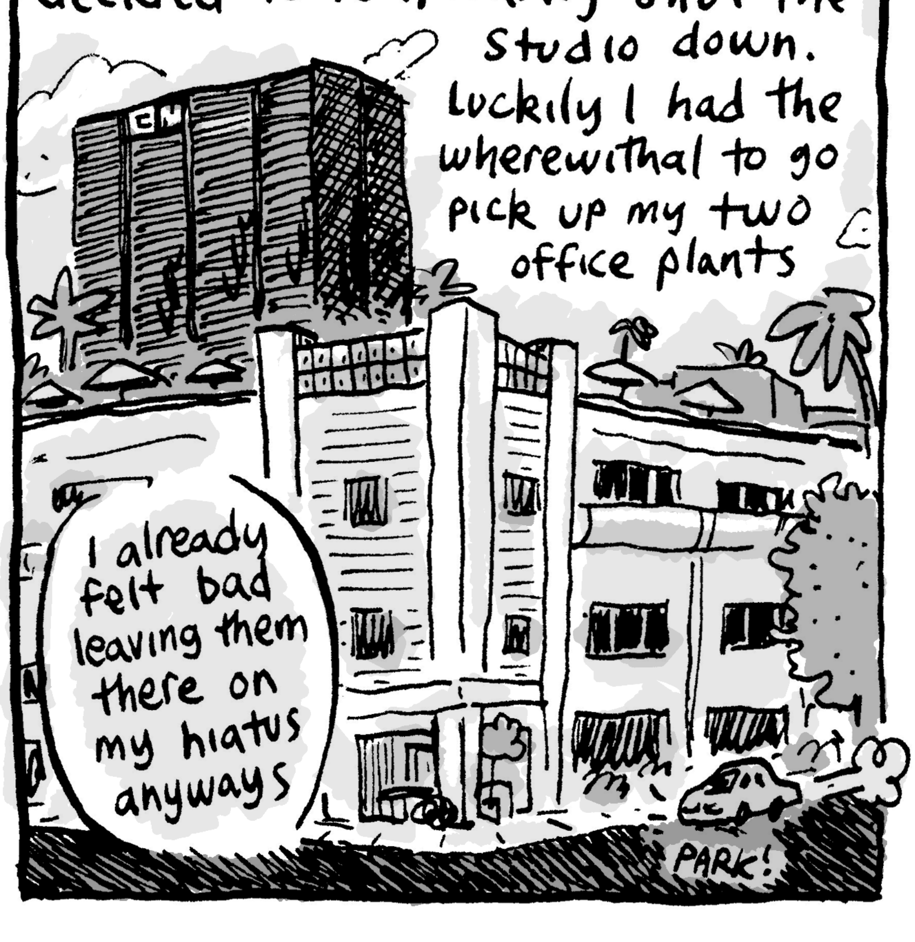
And so, with a new partner on the horizon, I embarked on another 2 week unpaid hiatus...

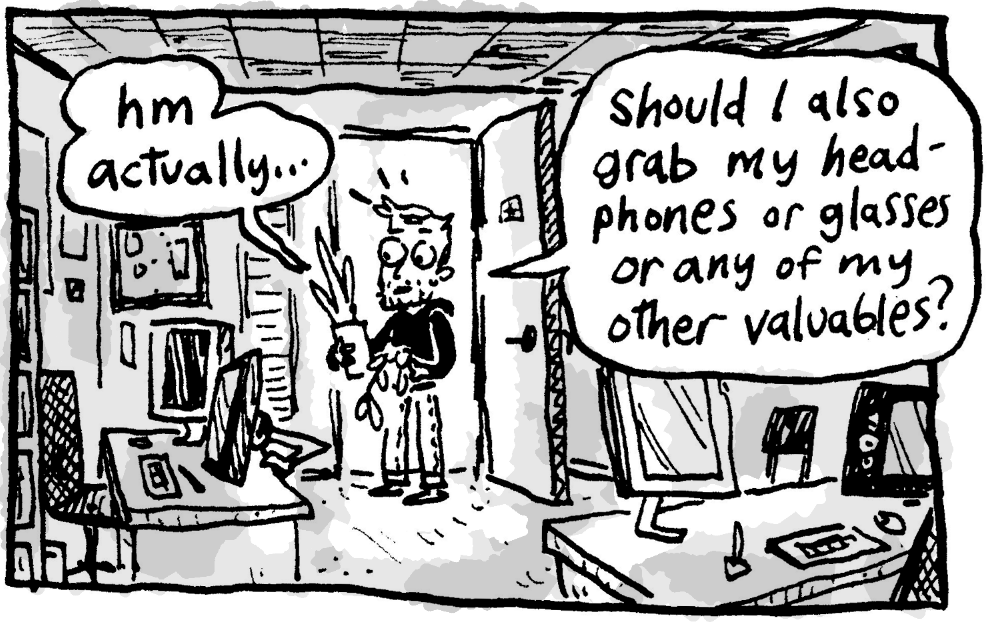

I'll save the other half of this granola bar as a treat for when I come back!

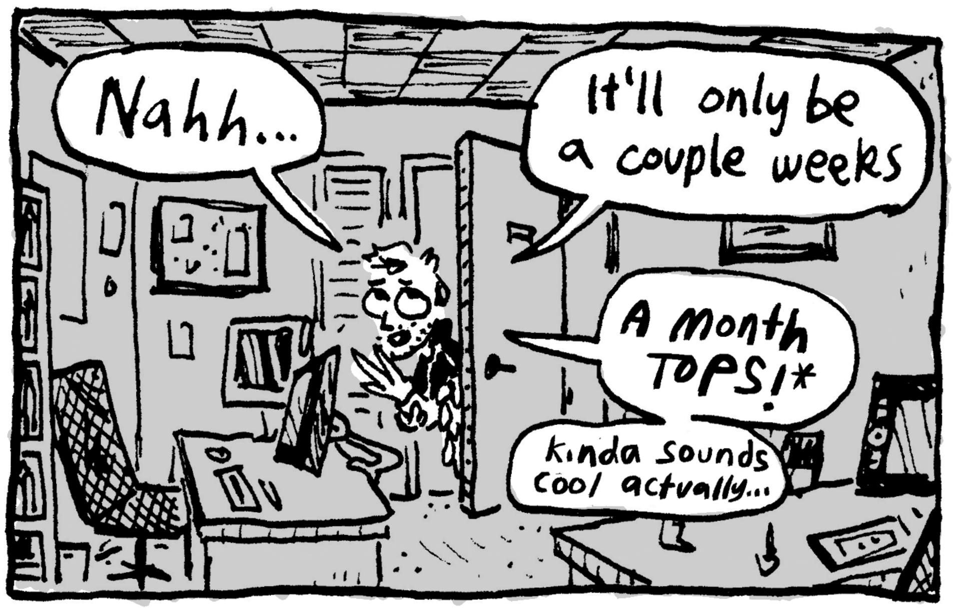
On my two weeks off I heard murmurings of other animation studios shutting down and forcing employees to work remotely for a few weeks...

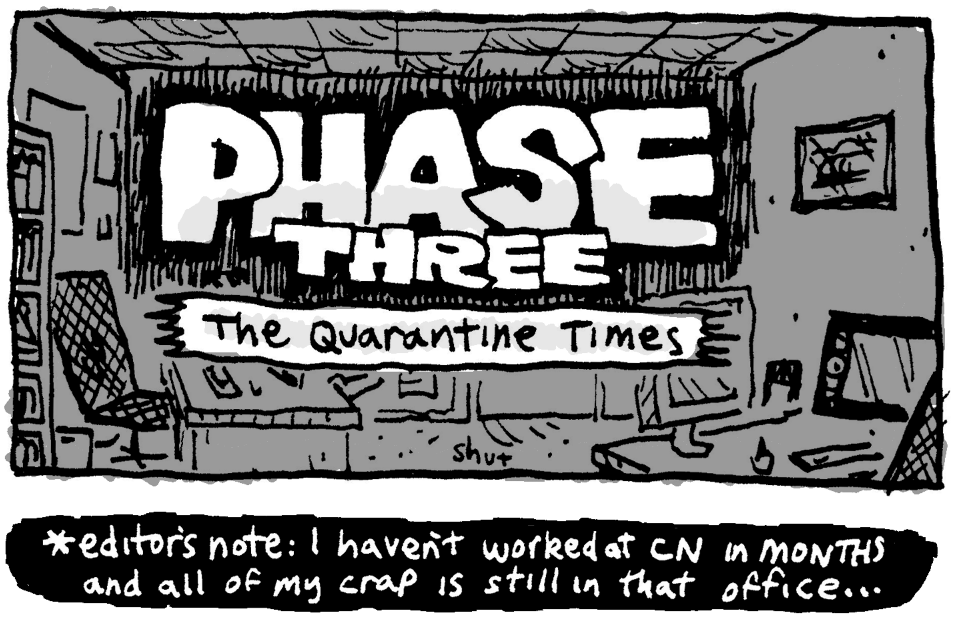

hm
I wonder if that's gonna happen to us?
Probably... right?

Sure enough, the week before we were supposed to return, CN decided to temporarily shut the studio down. Luckily I had the wherewithal to go pick up my two office plants

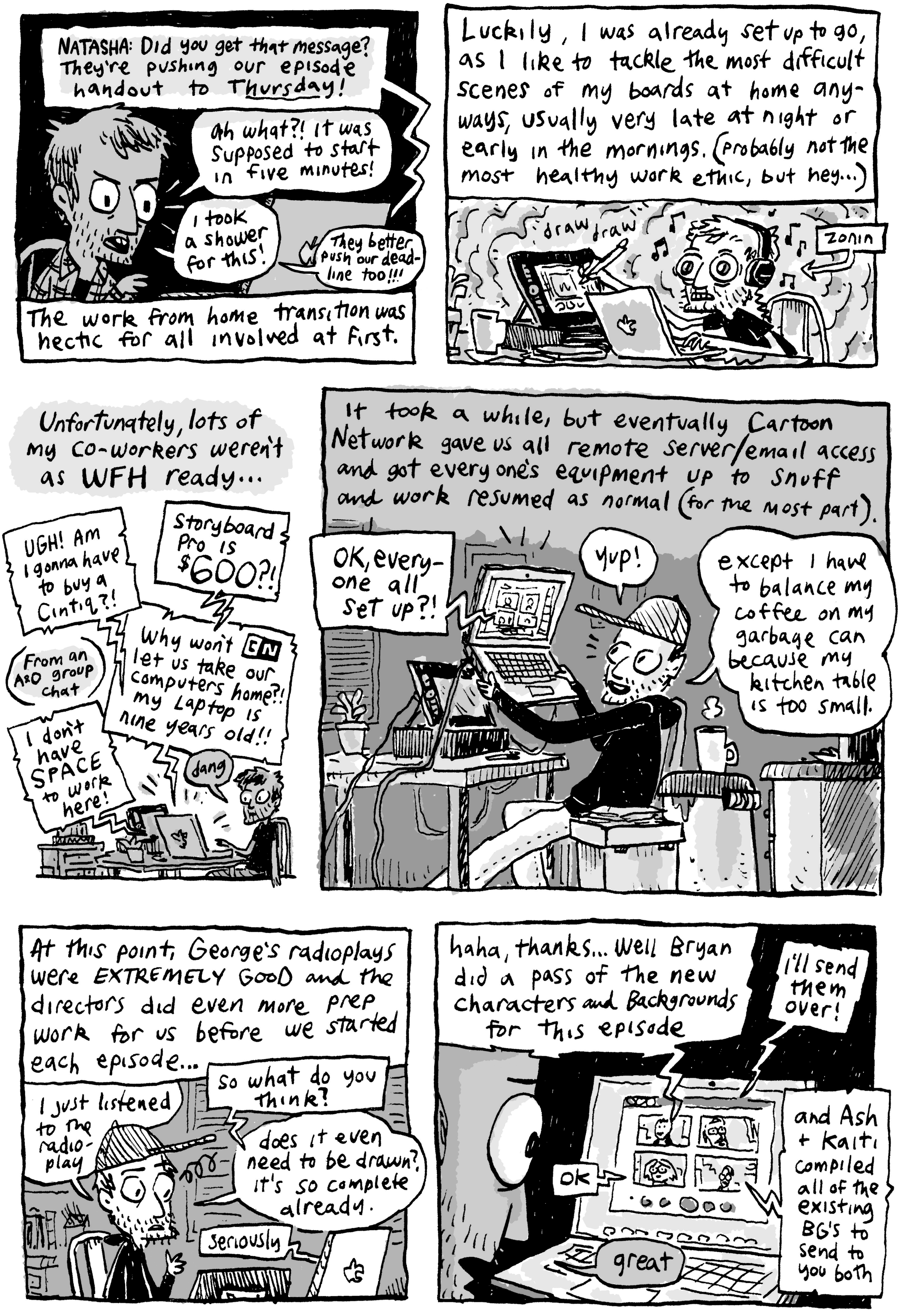

CN
I already felt bad leaving them there on my hiatus anyways
PARK!

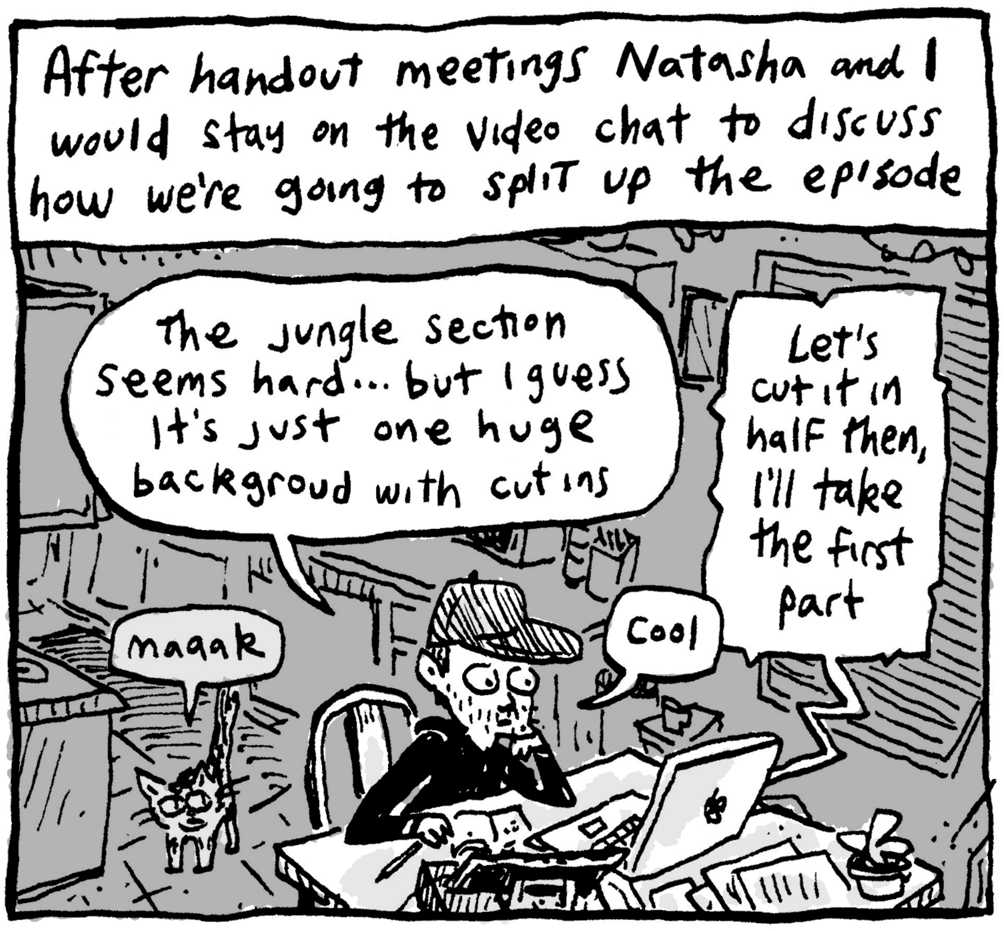

hm actually...
Should I also grab my headphones or glasses or any of my other valuables?

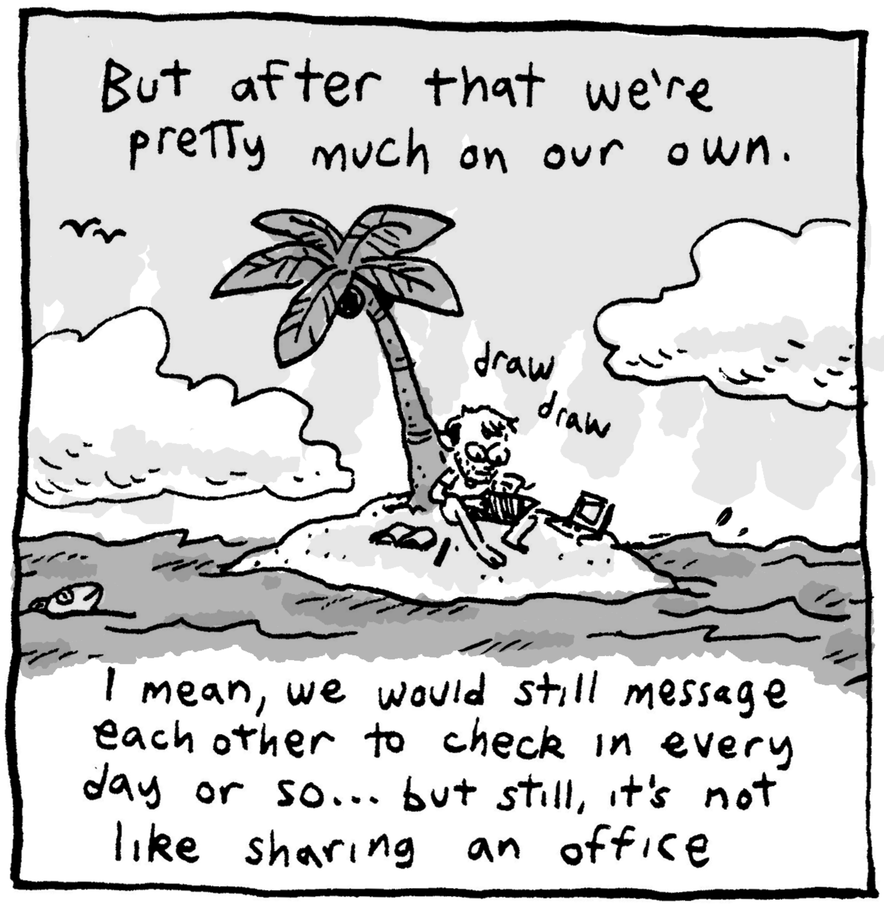

Nahh...
It'll only be a couple weeks
A month TOPS!*
Kinda sounds cool actually...


PHASE THREE
The Quarantine Times
shut

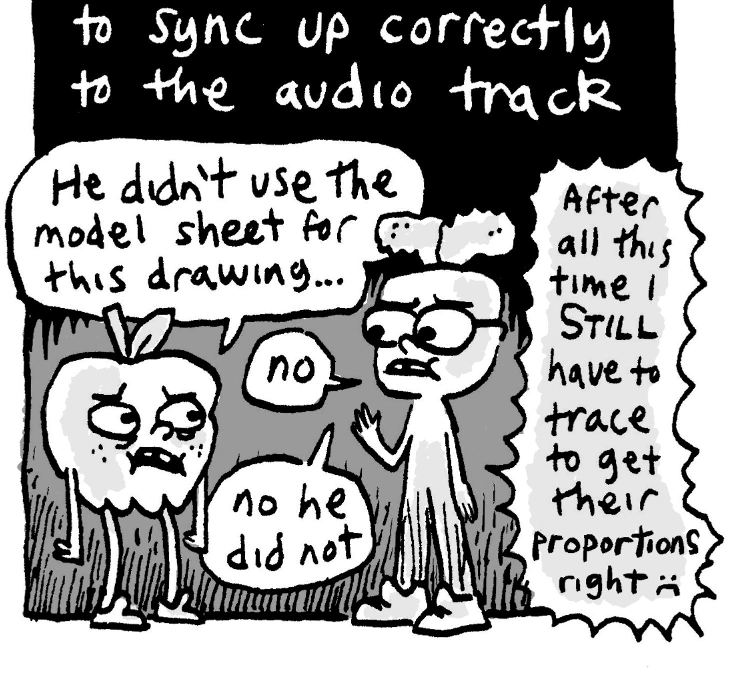
*editor's note: I haven't worked at CN in MONTHS and all of my crap is still in that office...


NATASHA: Did you get that message? They're pushing our episode handout to Thursday!
Ah what?! It was supposed to start in five minutes!
I took a shower for this!
They better push our deadline too!!!
The work from home transition was hectic for all involved at first.
Luckily, I was already set up to go, as I like to tackle the most difficult scenes of my boards at home anyways, usually very late at night or early in the mornings. (probably not the most healthy work ethic, but hey...)
draw draw
ZONIN
Unfortunately, lots of my co-workers weren't as WFH ready...
UGH! Am I gonna have to buy a Cintiq?!
Storyboard Pro is $600?!
From an A&O group chat
Why won't CN let us take our computers home?! my Laptop is nine years old!!
I don't have SPACE to work here!
dang
It took a while, but eventually Cartoon Network gave us all remote server/email access and got everyone's equipment up to snuff and work resumed as normal (for the most part).
OK, everyone all set up?!
yup!
except I have to balance my coffee on my garbage can because my kitchen table is too small.
At this point, George's radioplays were EXTREMELY GOOD and the directors did even more prep work for us before we started each episode...
I just listened to the radioplay
So what do you think?
does it even need to be drawn? it's so complete already.
seriously
haha, thanks... Well Bryan did a pass of the new characters and Backgrounds for this episode
I'll send them over!
OK
and Ash + Kaiti compiled all of the existing BG's to send to you both
great

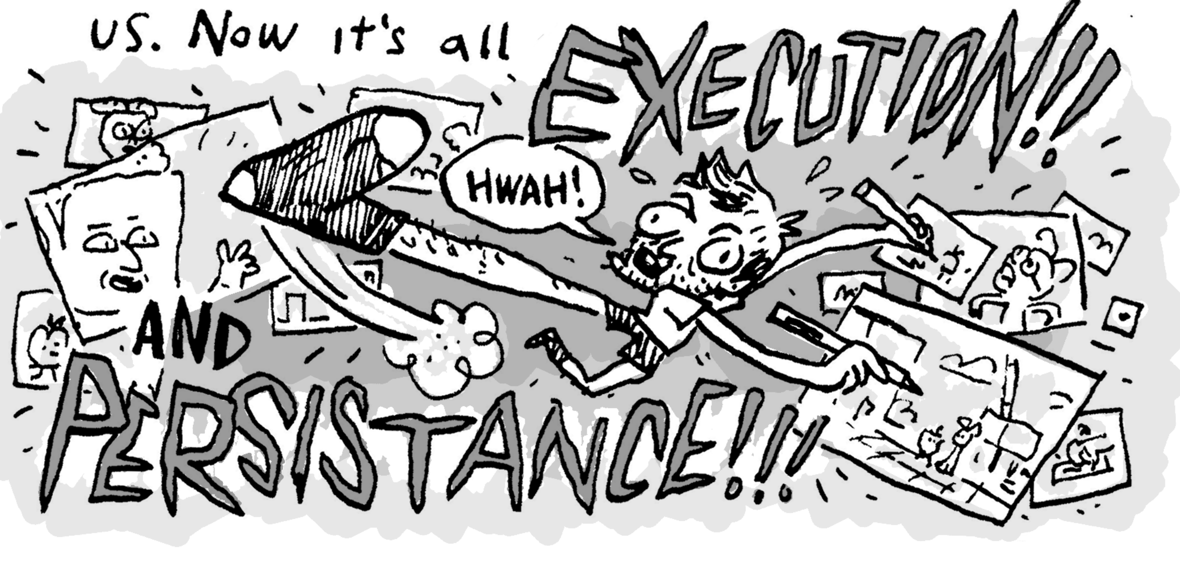

After handout meetings Natasha and I would stay on the video chat to discuss how we're going to split up the episode
The jungle section seems hard... but I guess it's just one huge backgroud with cut ins
Let's cut it in half then, I'll take the first part
Cool
maaak

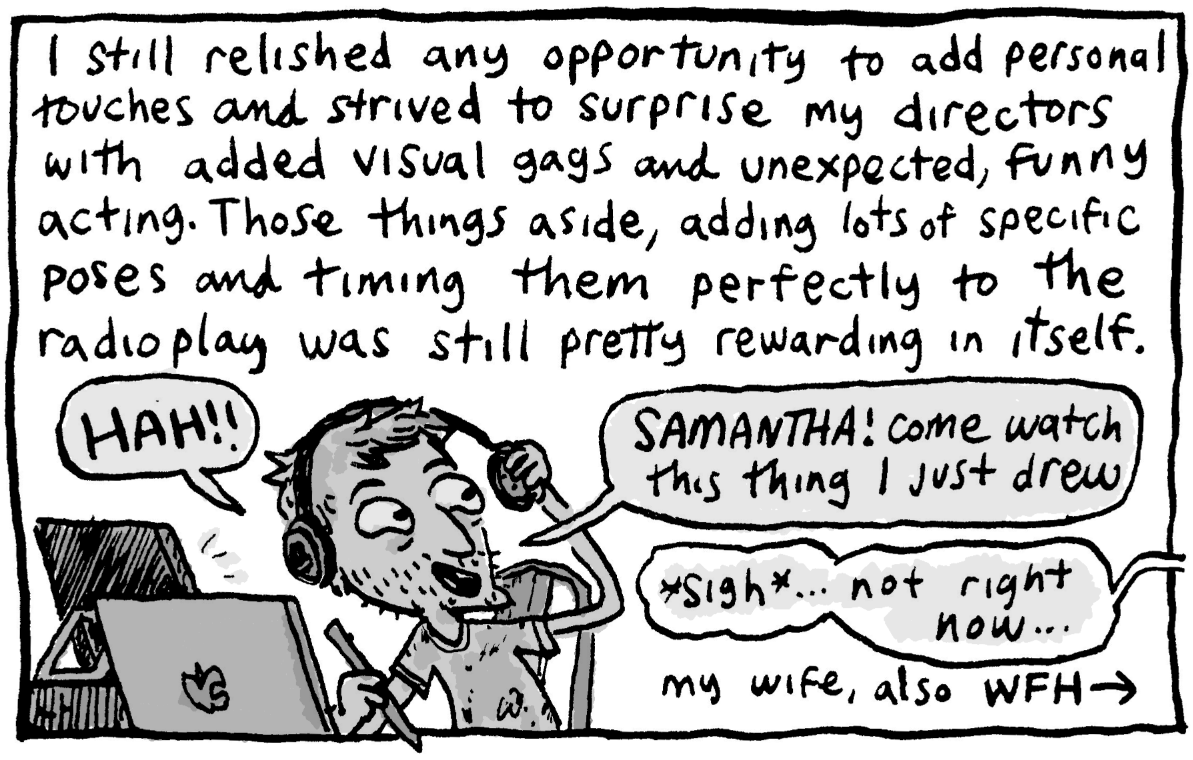

But after that we're pretty much on our own.
draw
draw
I mean, we would still message each other to check in every day or so... but still, it's not like sharing an office

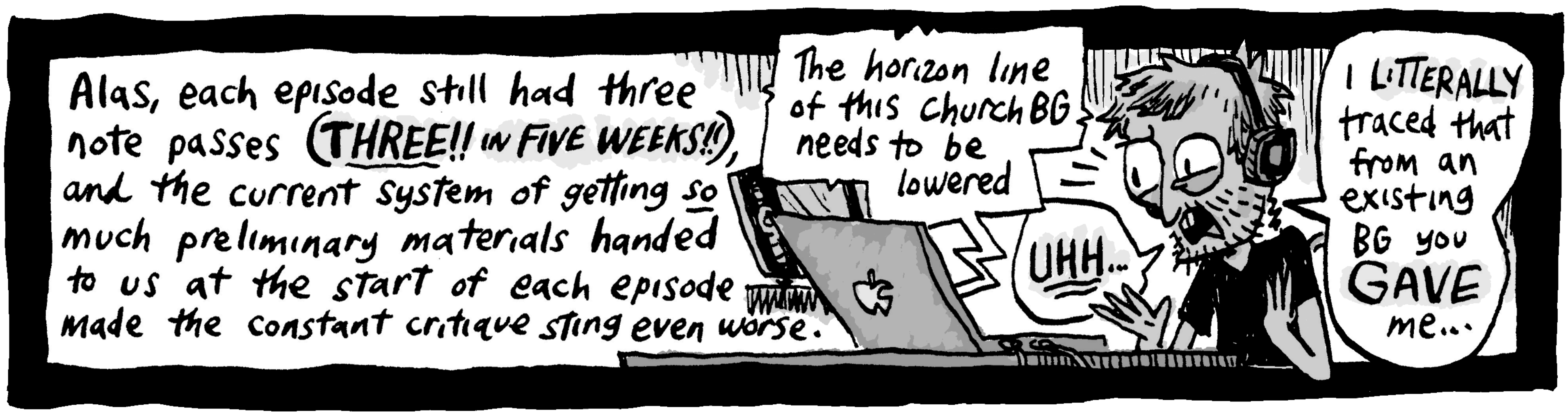
The scheduling was the same, but my Job felt different now... not only are we not working in an office anymore, but we were also starting off every episode rotation with **SO** much direction and guidance that all it felt like I was doing most of the time was finding and inserting the correct background, tracing character model sheets, and adjusting camera moves just right to sync up correctly to the audio track

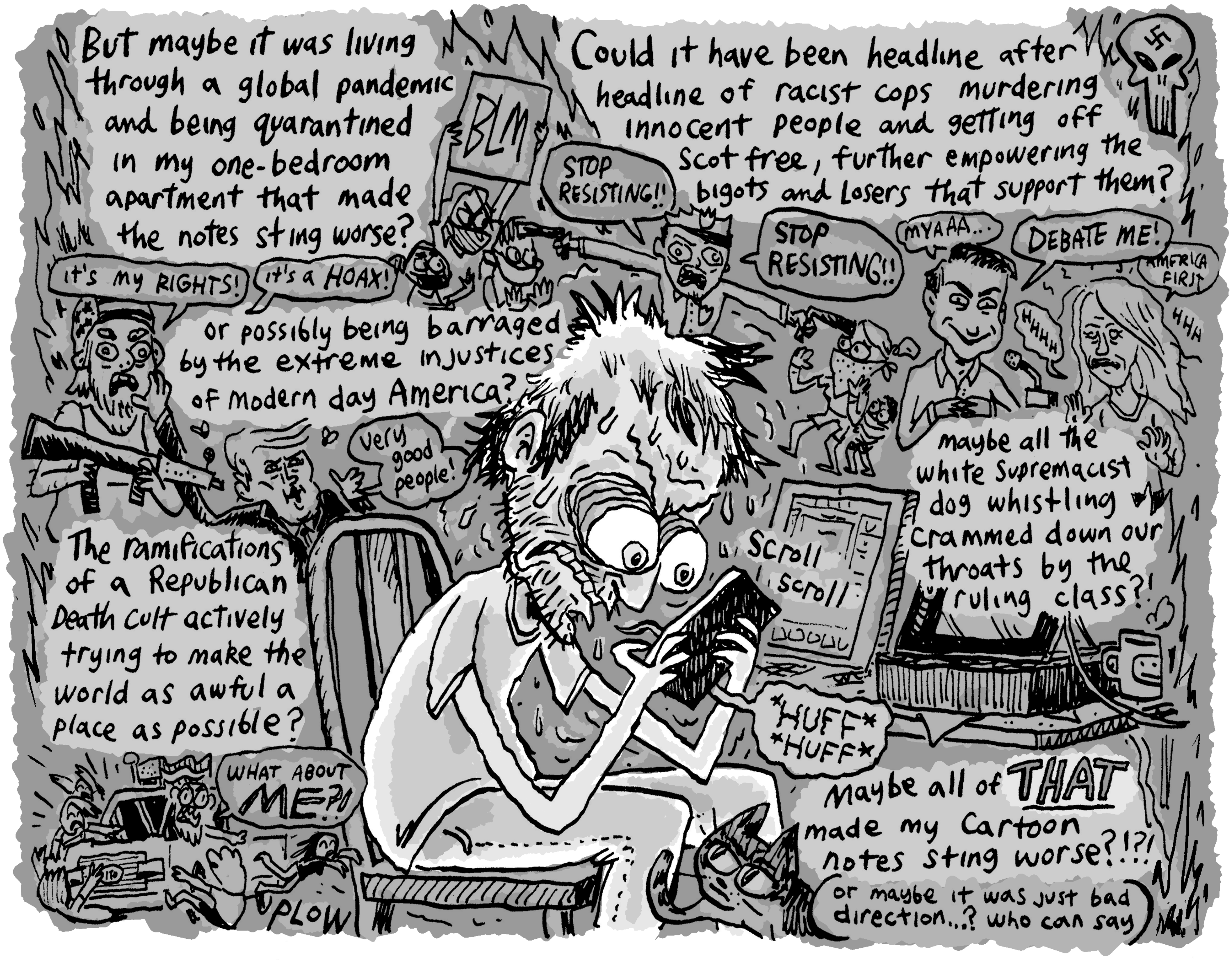

He didn't use the model sheet for this drawing...
no
no he did not
After all this time I STILL have to trace to get their proportions right ;;

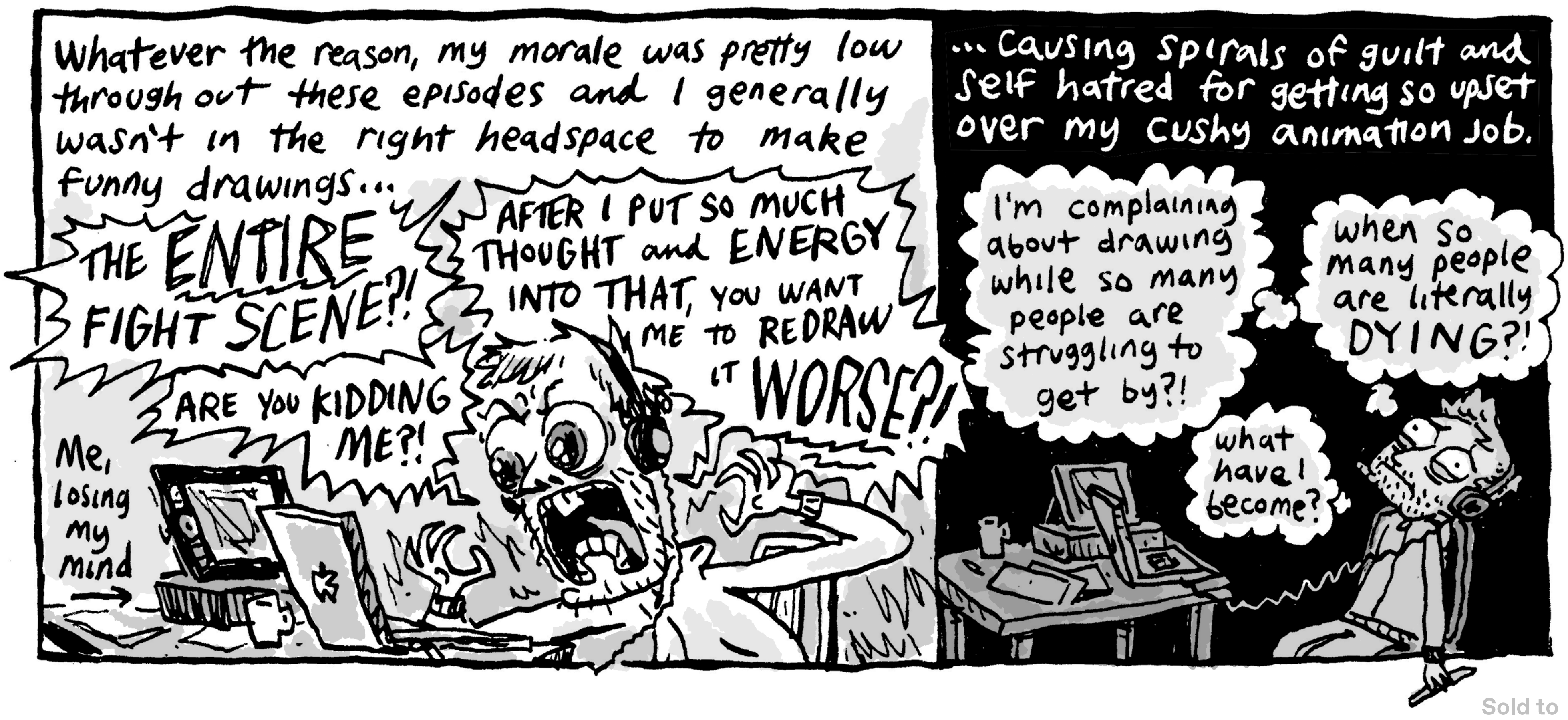
Of course that's an oversimplification, as the acting/staging/cutting choices of the board artists required a lot of thought and hard work, and greatly influenced the end product... but the mentally taxing "problem Solving Through Storytelling" part of A&D boarding was behind us. Now it's all

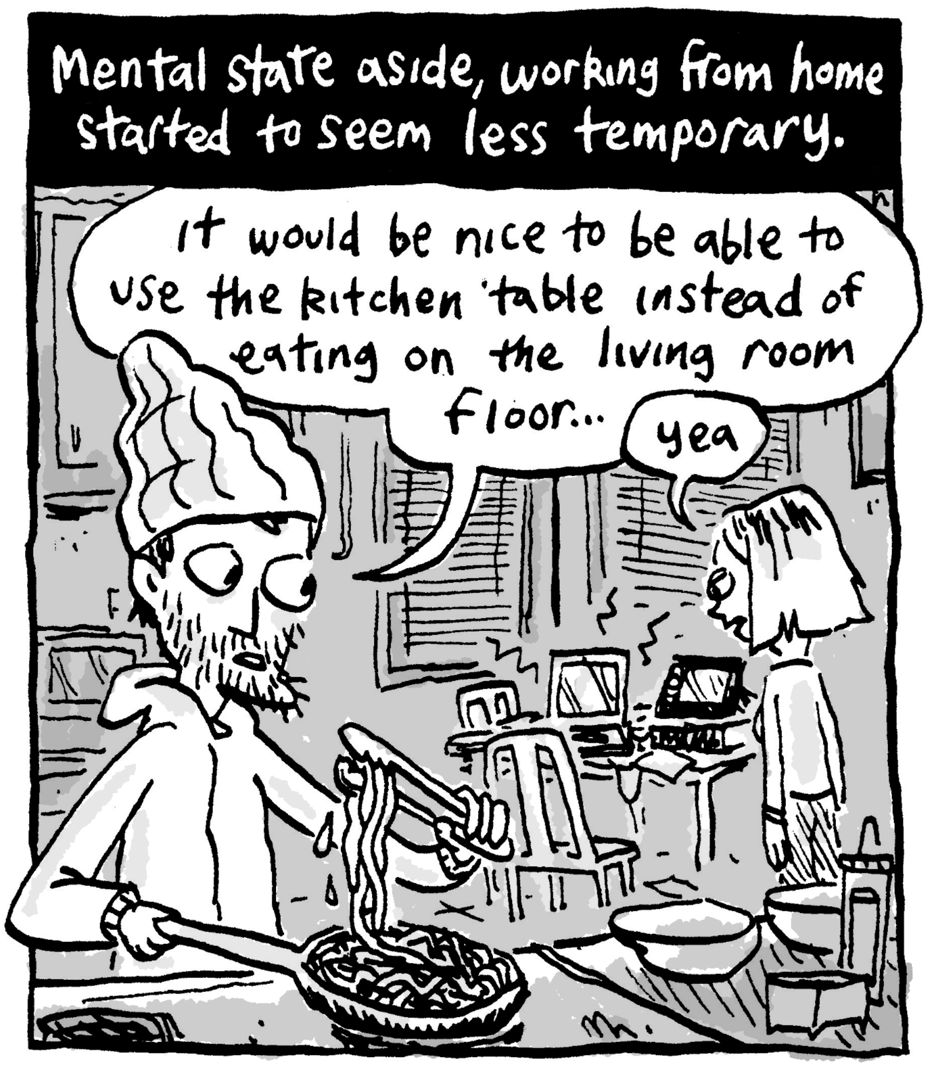

EXECUTION!!
HWAH!
AND
PERSISTANCE!!!

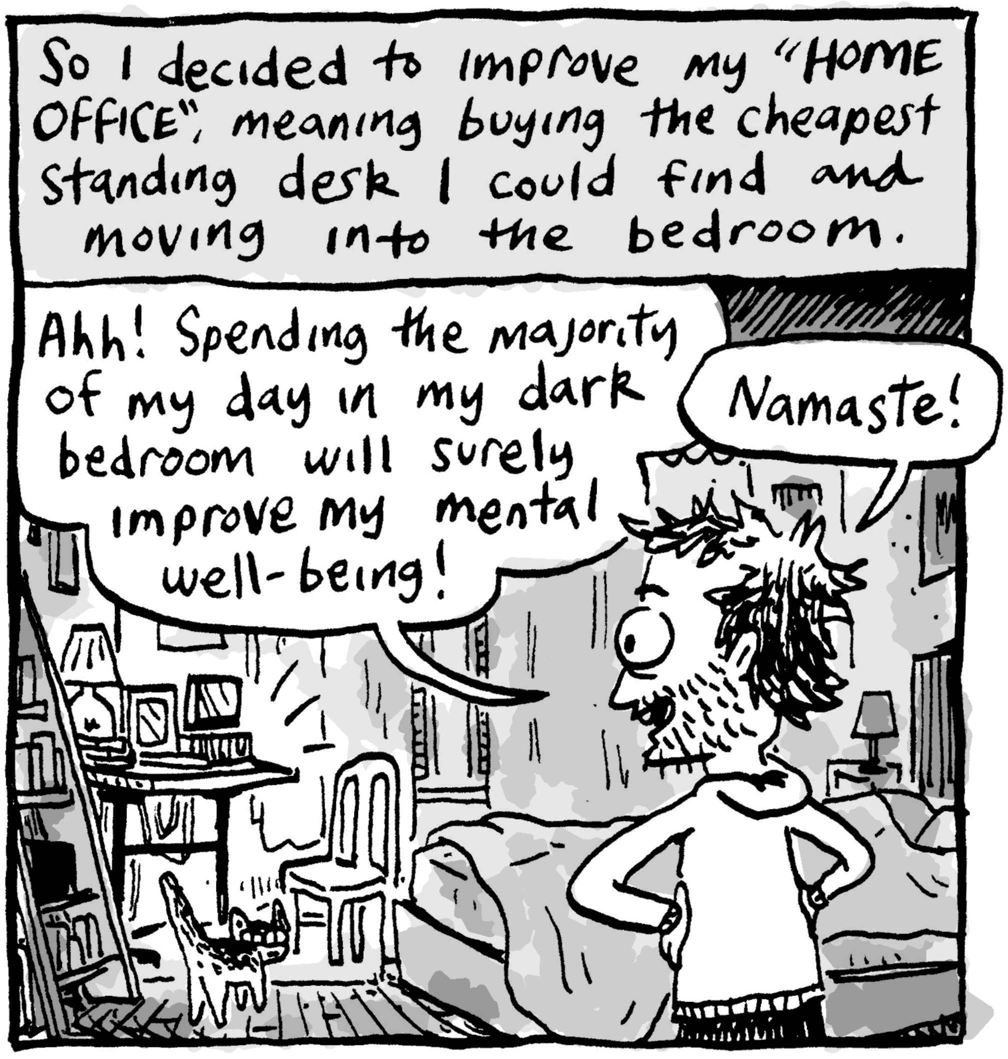

I still relished any opportunity to add personal touches and strived to surprise my directors with added visual gags and unexpected, funny acting. Those things aside, adding lots of specific poses and timing them perfectly to the radioplay was still pretty rewarding in itself.
HAH!!
SAMANTHA! come watch this thing I just drew
sigh... not right now...
my wife, also WFH →

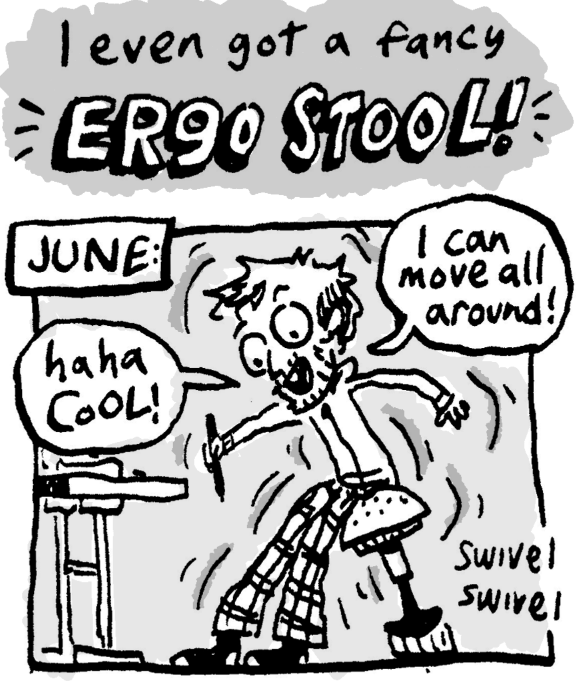

Alas, each episode still had three note passes (THREE!! IN FIVE WEEKS!!), and the current system of getting so much preliminary materials handed to us at the start of each episode made the constant critique sting even worse.
The horizon line of this Church BG needs to be lowered
UHH...
I LITTERALLY traced that from an existing BG you GAVE me...

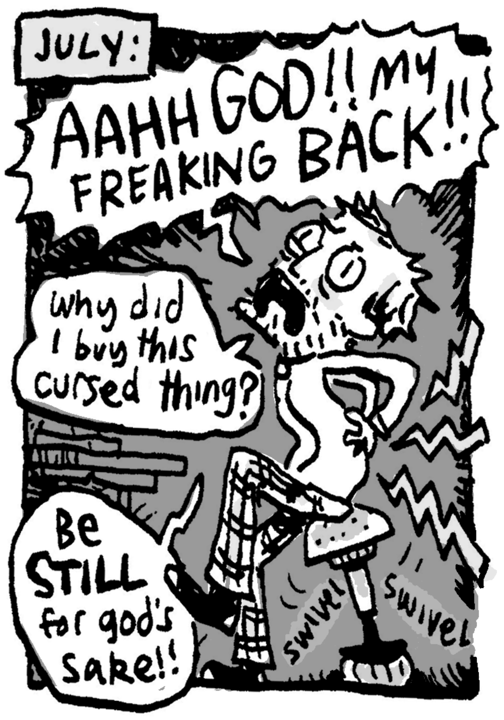

But maybe it was living through a global pandemic and being quarantined in my one-bedroom apartment that made the notes sting worse?
BLM
Could it have been headline after headline of racist cops murdering innocent people and getting off scot free, further empowering the bigots and losers that support them?
STOP RESISTING!!
STOP RESISTING!!
MYAAA...
DEBATE ME!
AMERICA FIRST
HHHH
HHH
it's my RIGHTS!
it's a HOAX!
or possibly being barraged by the extreme injustices of modern day America?
very good people!
maybe all the white supremacist dog whistling crammed down our throats by the ruling class?!
The ramifications of a Republican Death Cult actively trying to make the world as awful a place as possible?
Scroll
Scroll
HUFF
HUFF
WHAT ABOUT ME?!
PLOW
Maybe all of THAT made my Cartoon notes sting worse?!?!
(or maybe it was just bad direction...? who can say)

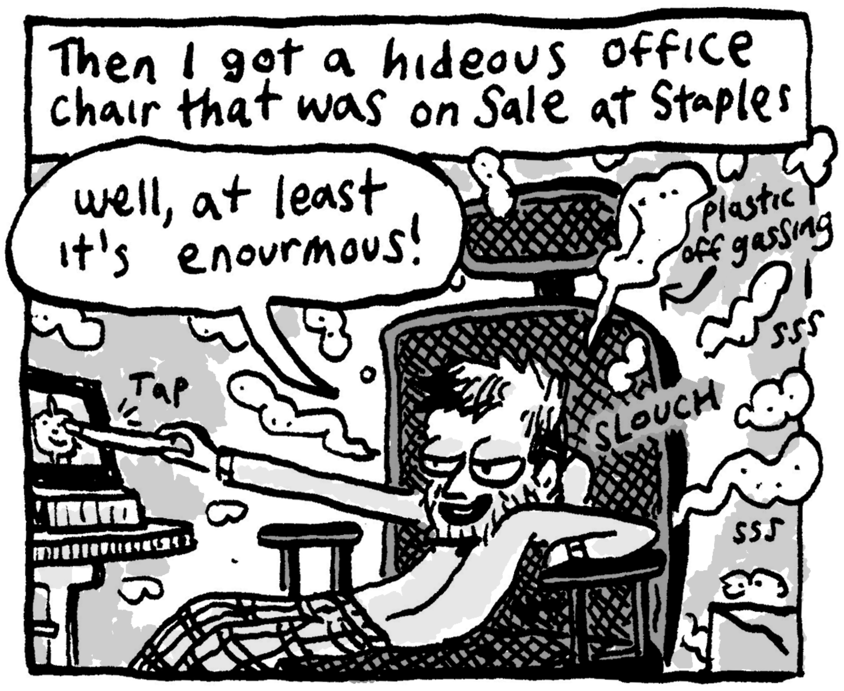

Whatever the reason, my morale was pretty low throughout these episodes and I generally wasn't in the right headspace to make funny drawings...
THE ENTIRE FIGHT SCENE?!
AFTER I PUT SO MUCH THOUGHT and ENERGY INTO THAT, YOU WANT ME TO REDRAW IT WORSE?!
ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!
Me, losing my mind
...Causing spirals of guilt and self hatred for getting so upset over my cushy animation job.
I'm complaining about drawing while so many people are struggling to get by?!
when so many people are literally DYING?!
what have I become?

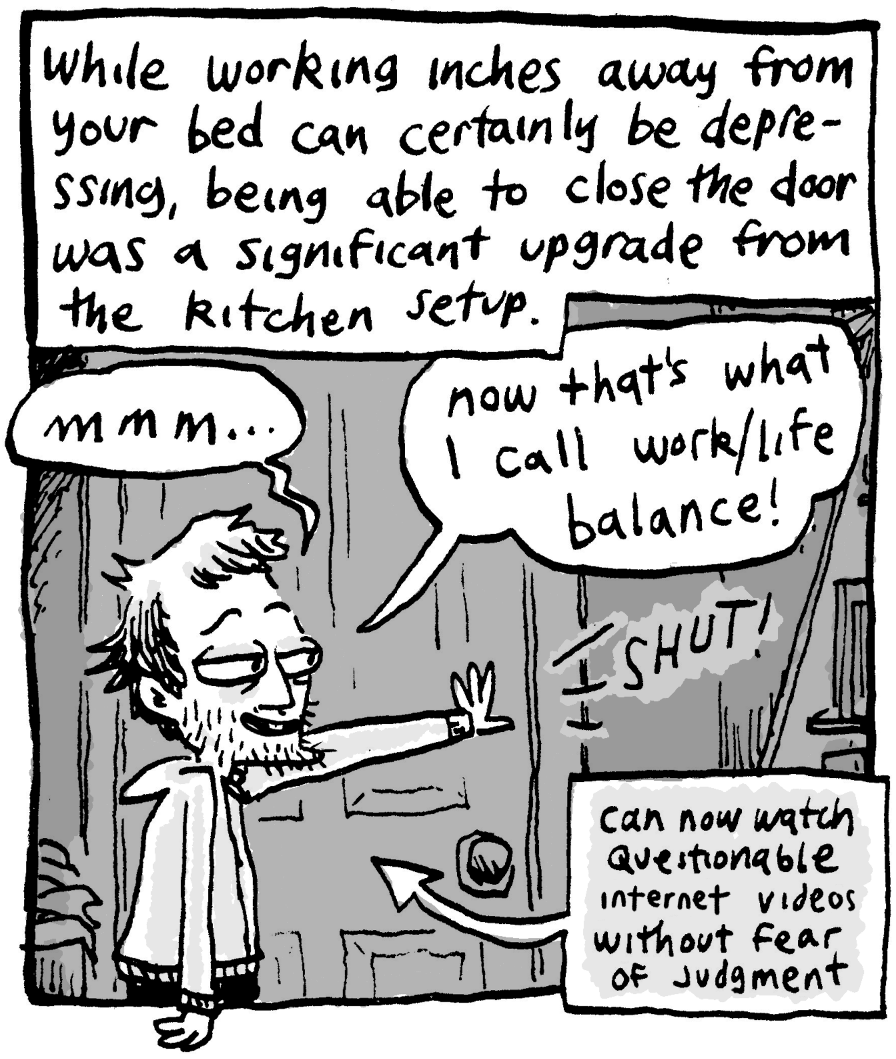

Mental state aside, working from home started to seem less temporary.
It would be nice to be able to use the kitchen table instead of eating on the living room floor...
yea

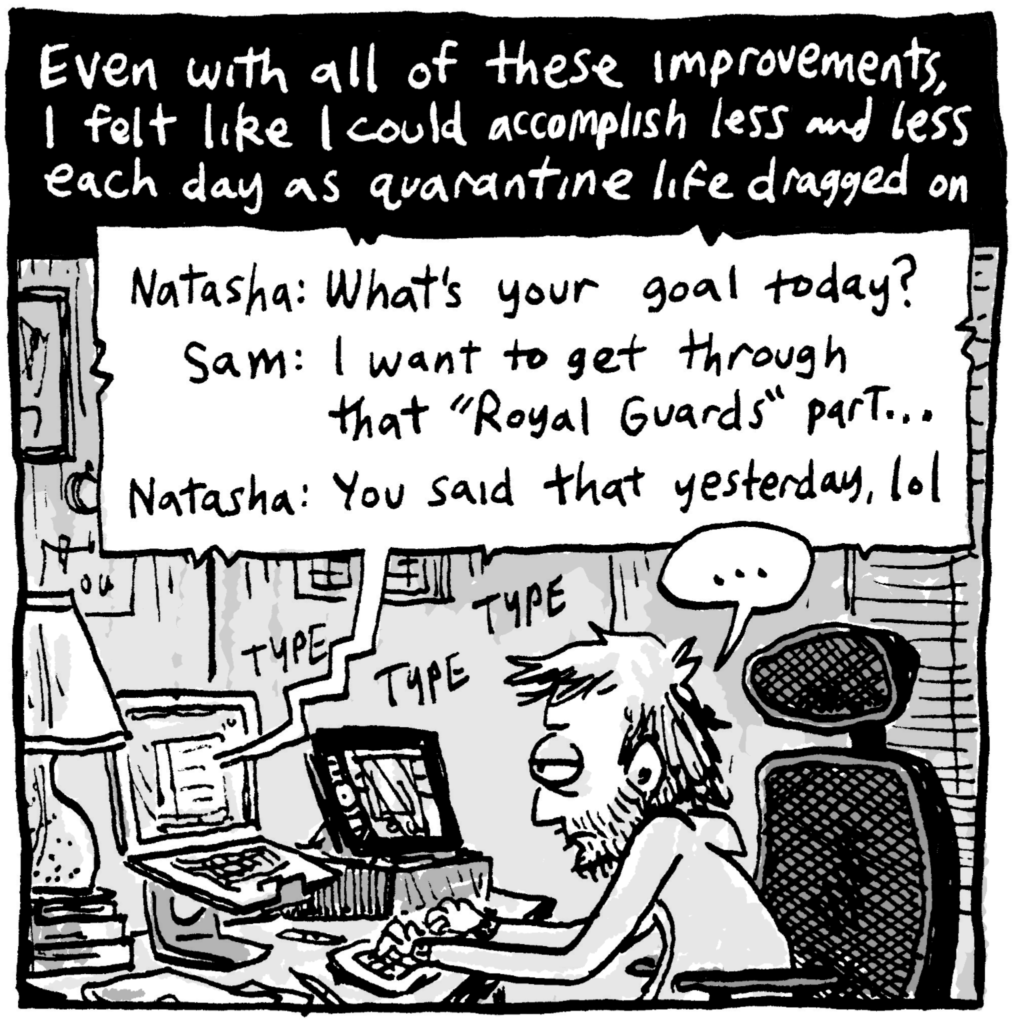

So I decided to improve my "HOME OFFICE", meaning buying the cheapest standing desk I could find and moving into the bedroom.
Ahh! Spending the majority of my day in my dark bedroom will surely improve my mental well-being!
Namaste!


I even got a fancy ERGO STOOL!
JUNE:
I can move all around!
haha COOL!
swivel swivel

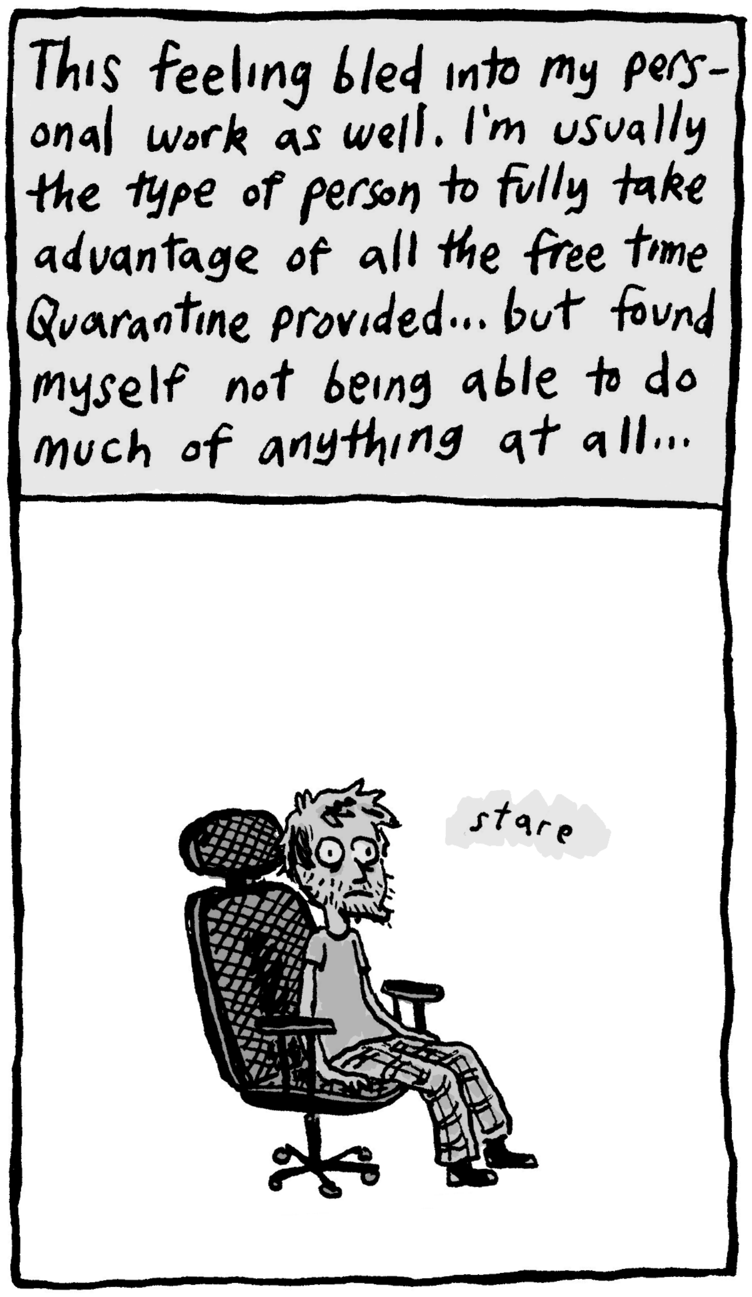

JULY:
AAHH GOD!! MY FREAKING BACK!!
Why did I buy this cursed thing?
Be STILL for god's sake!!
swivel swivel


Then I got a hideous office chair that was on sale at Staples
well, at least it's enourmous!
plastic off gassing
sss
sss
Tap
SLOUCH

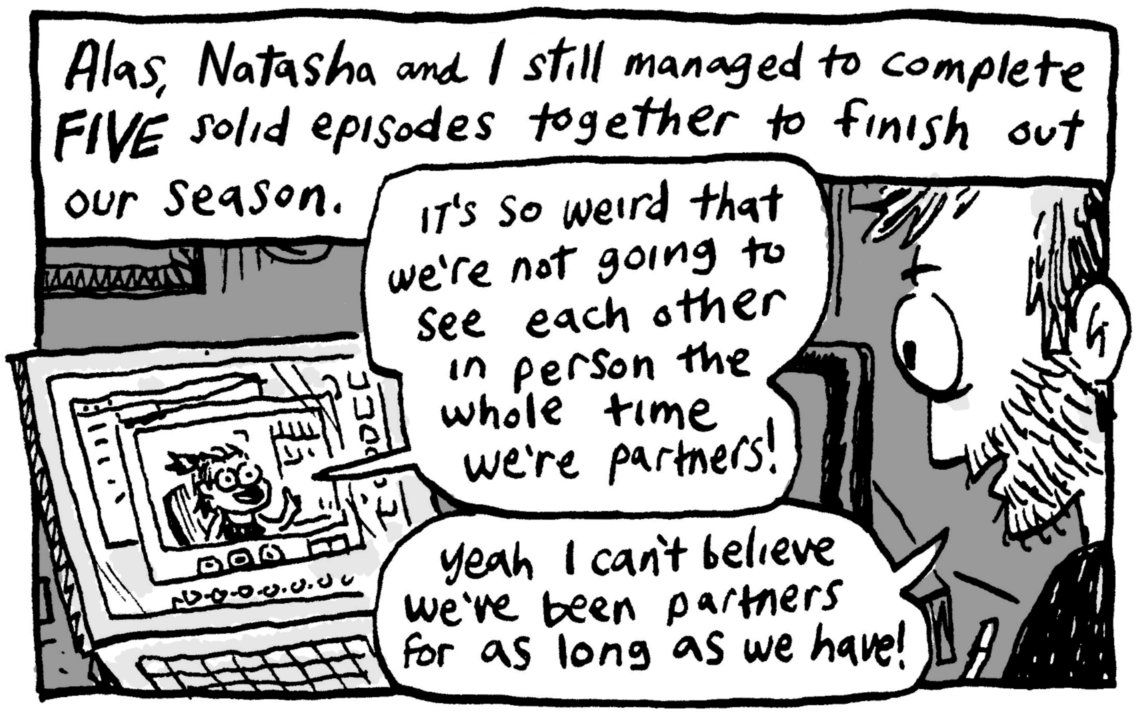

While working inches away from your bed can certainly be depressing, being able to close the door was a significant upgrade from the kitchen setup.
mmm...
now that's what I call work/life balance!
SHUT!
can now watch questionable internet videos without fear of judgment


Even with all of these improvements, I felt like I could accomplish less and less each day as quarantine life dragged on
Natasha: What's your goal today?
Sam: I want to get through that "Royal Guards" part...
Natasha: You said that yesterday, lol
...
TYPE
TYPE
TYPE

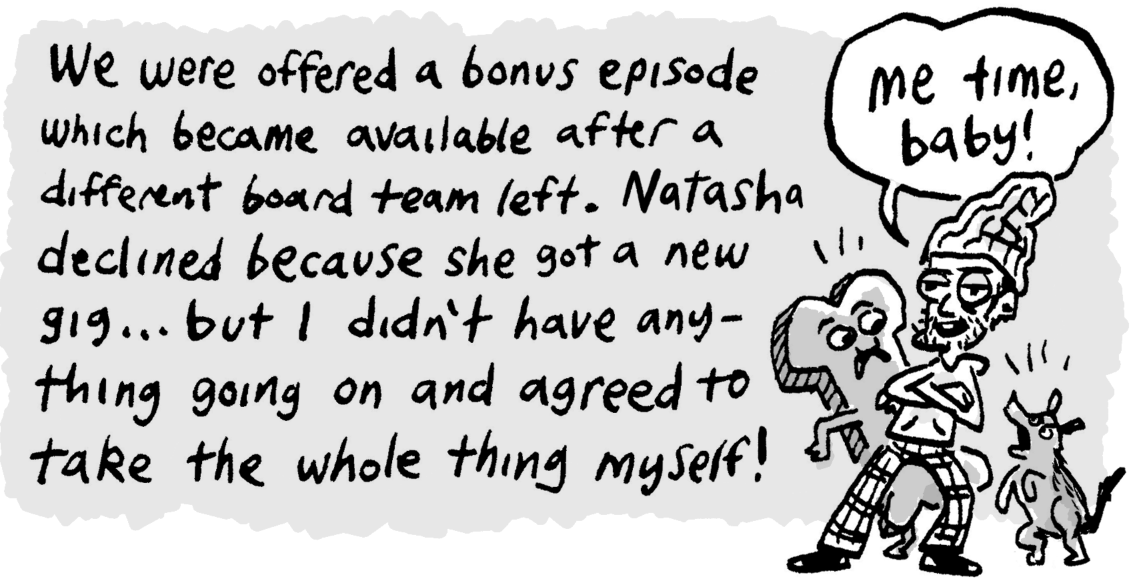
This feeling bled into my personal work as well. I'm usually the type of person to fully take advantage of all the free time Quarantine provided... but found myself not being able to do much of anything at all...



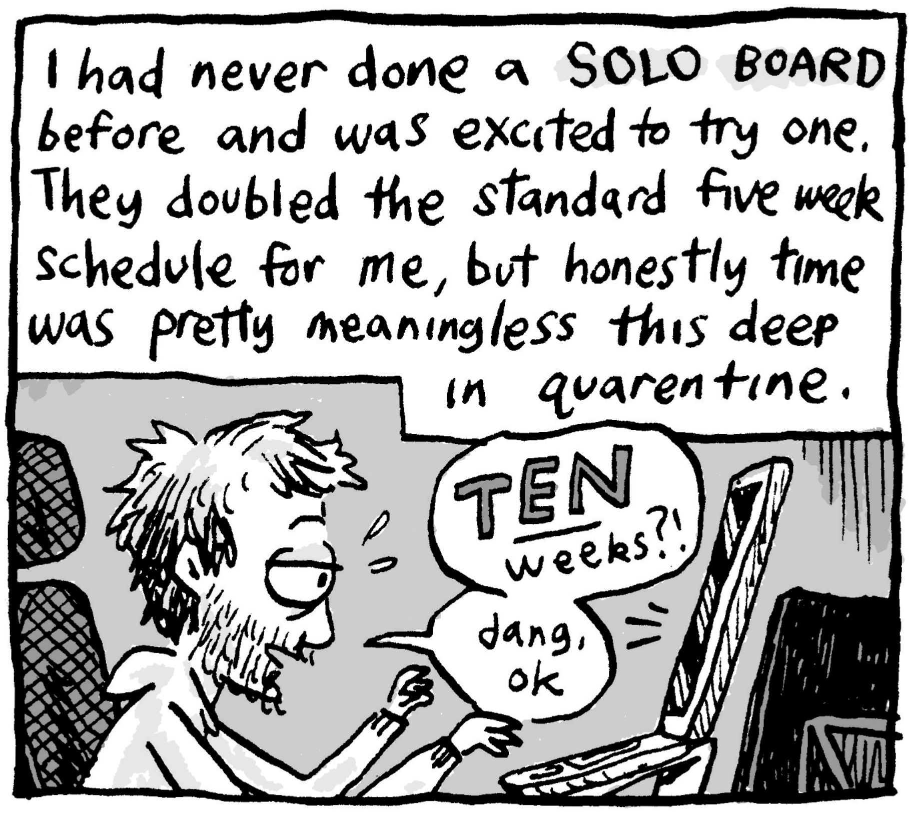
Alas, Natasha and I still managed to complete **FIVE** solid episodes together to finish out our season.


It's so weird that we're not going to see each other in person the whole time we're partners!
yeah I can't believe we've been partners for as long as we have!

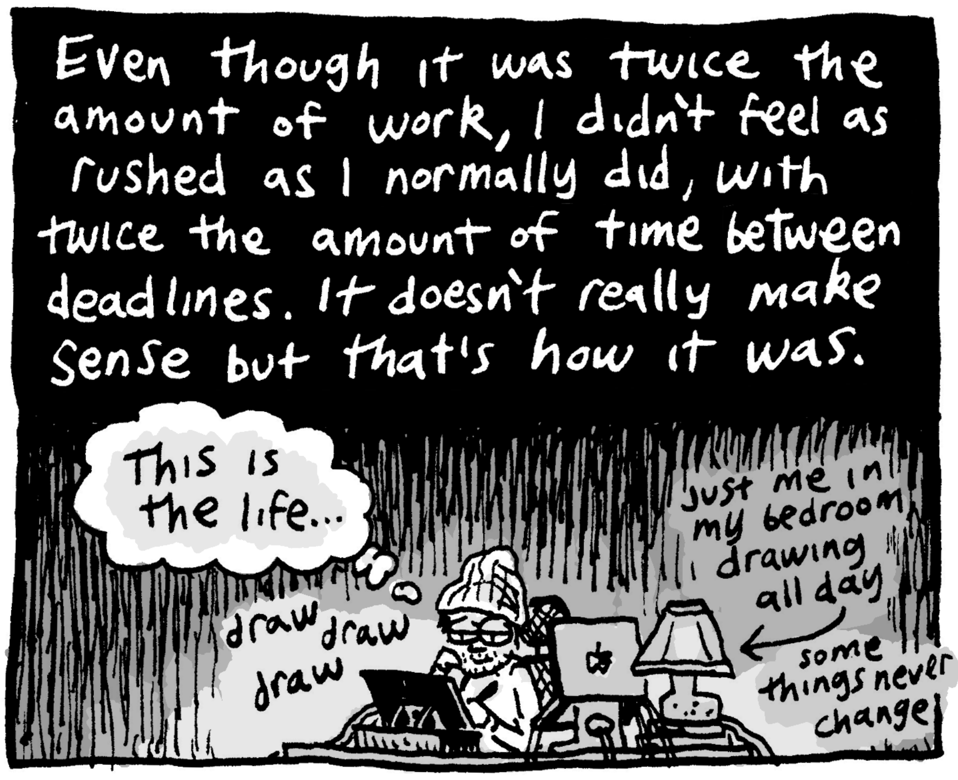
We were offered a bonus episode which became available after a different board team left. Natasha declined because she got a new gig... but I didn't have anything going on and agreed to take the whole thing myself!


Me time, baby!

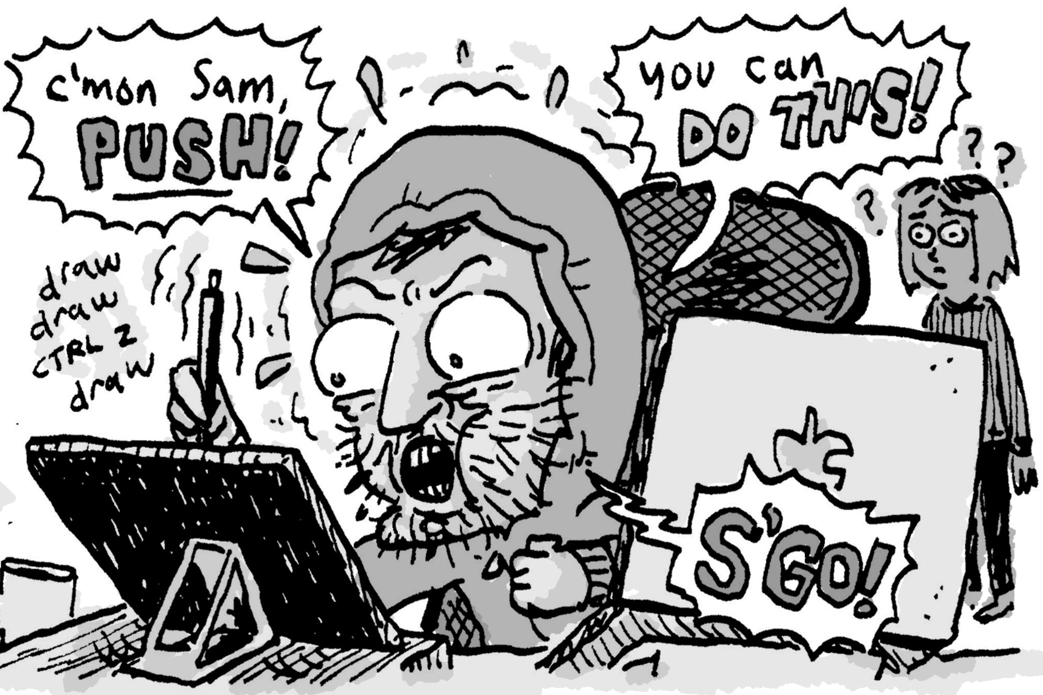
I had never done a SOLO BOARD before and was excited to try one. They doubled the standard five week schedule for me, but honestly time was pretty meaningless this deep in quarentine.


TEN weeks?!
dang, ok

Even though it was twice the amount of work, I didn't feel as rushed as I normally did, with twice the amount of time between deadlines. It doesn't really make sense but that's how it was.


This is the life...
draw draw draw
Just me in my bedroom drawing all day
some things never change!

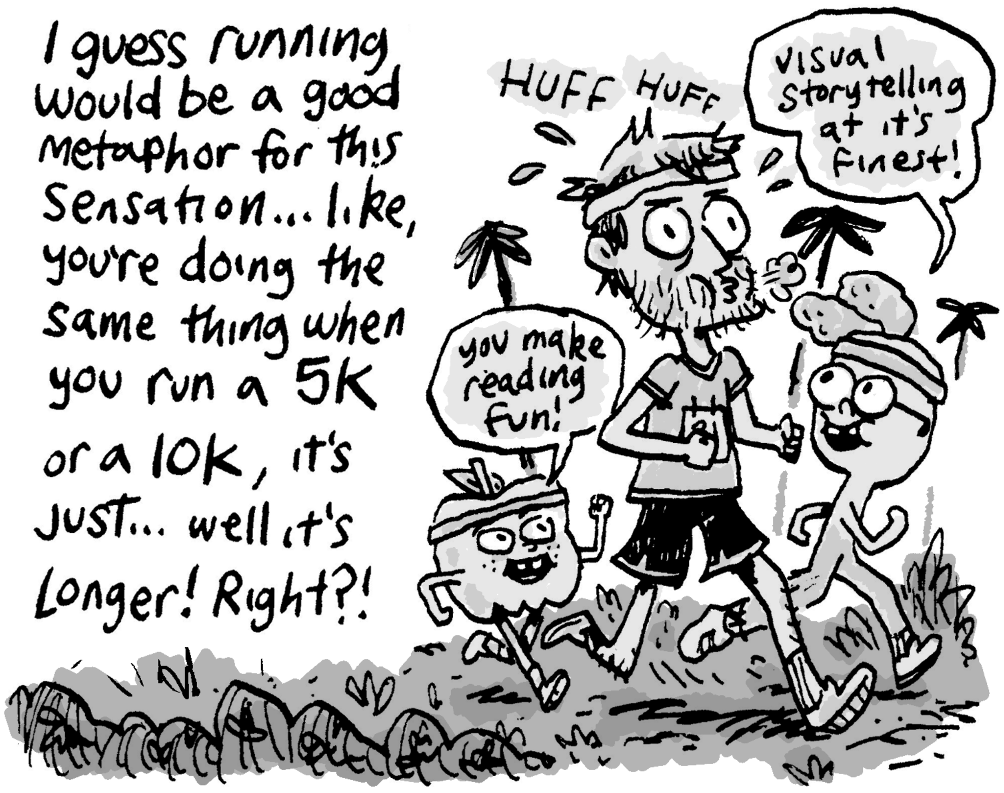
Actually, the most challenging difference was the overall change in **MOMENTUM**

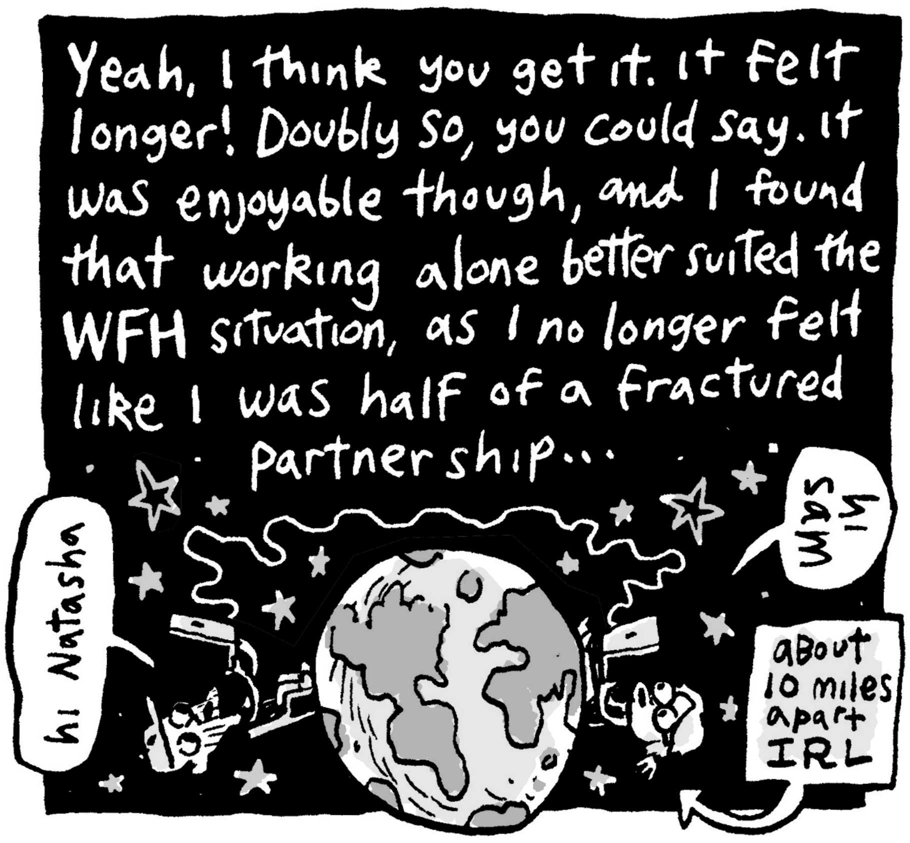

c'mon Sam, PUSH!
you can DO THIS!
??
?
draw draw CTRL Z draw
S'GO!

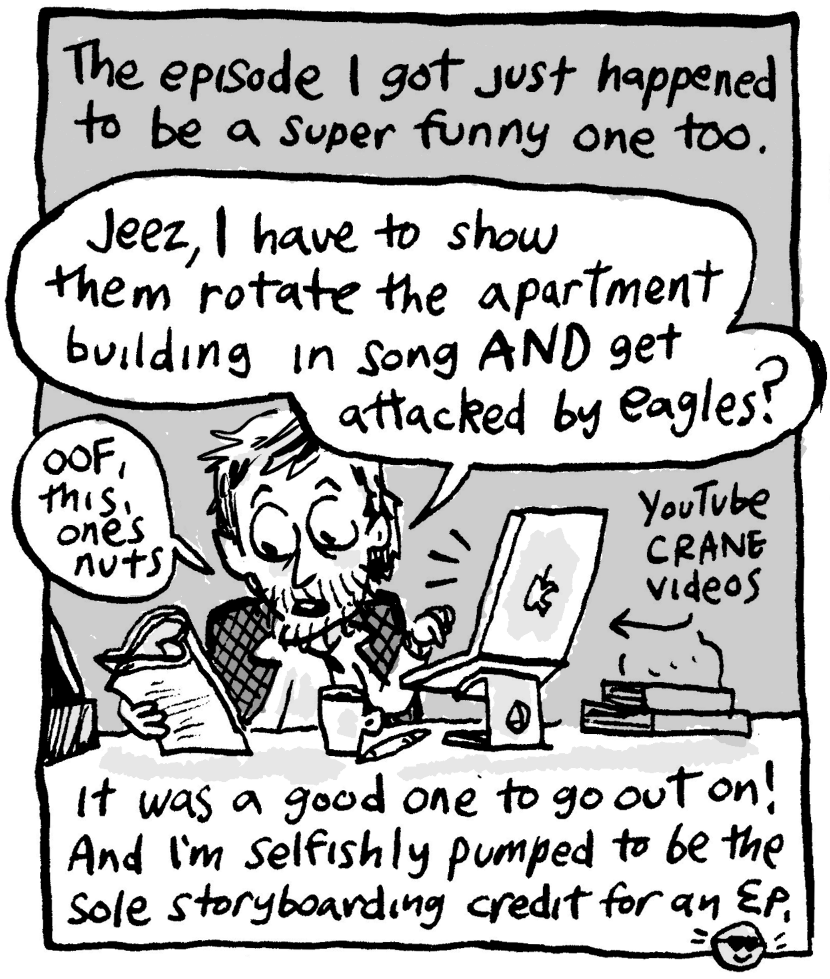
It was almost like my body got used to the rhythm of hitting the deadlines of the five week cycle. Doubling everything pushed my self-dicipline skills, and I had to sustain my work stamina twice as long between pitches.

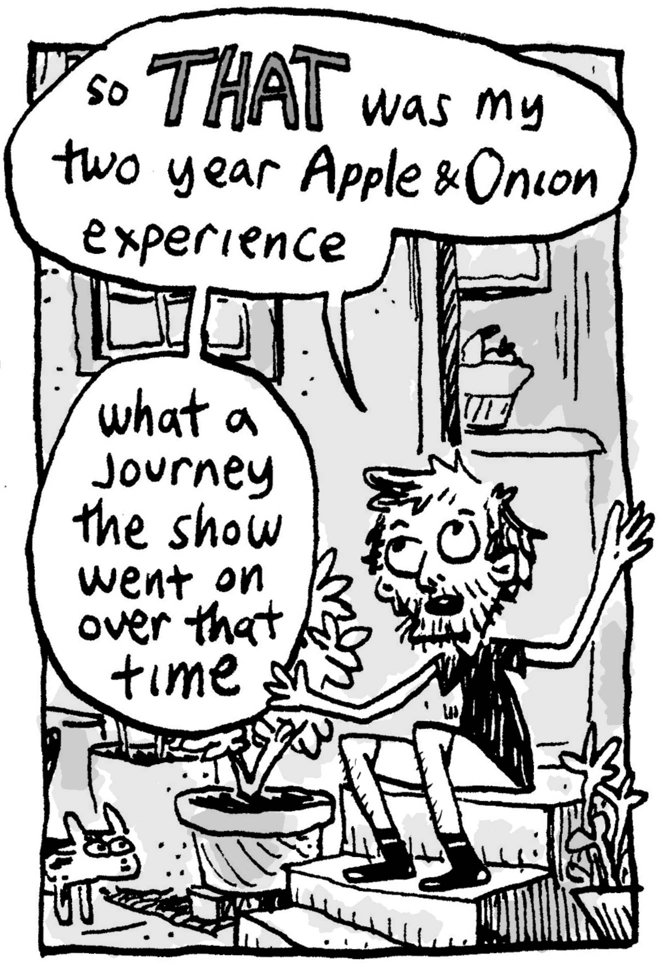
Sold to krvaldez1357@gmail.com

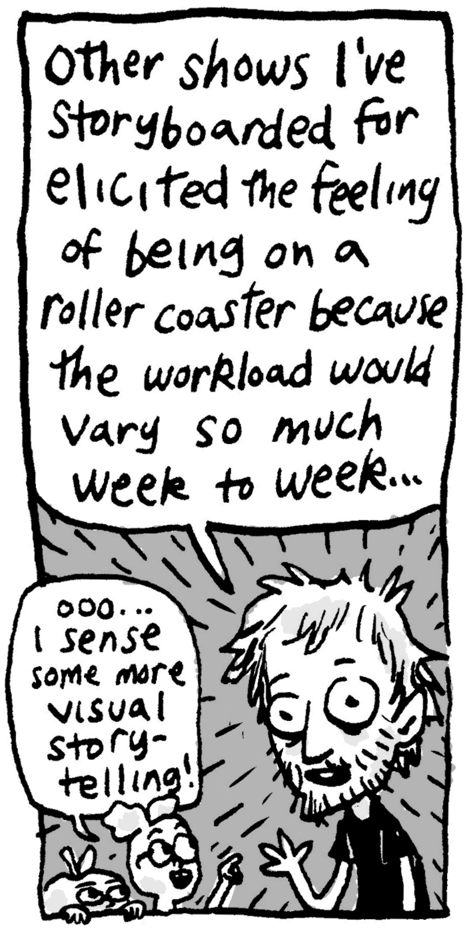
I guess running would be a good metaphor for this sensation... like, you're doing the same thing when you run a 5K or a 10K, it's just... well it's longer! Right?!

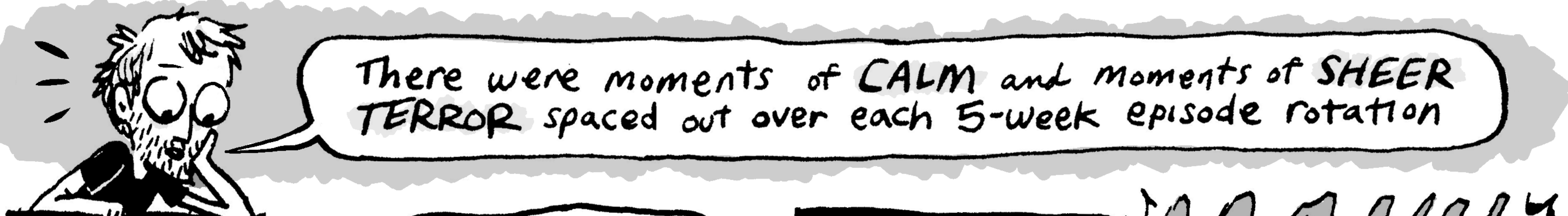

HUFF HUFF
visual storytelling at it's finest!
you make reading fun!

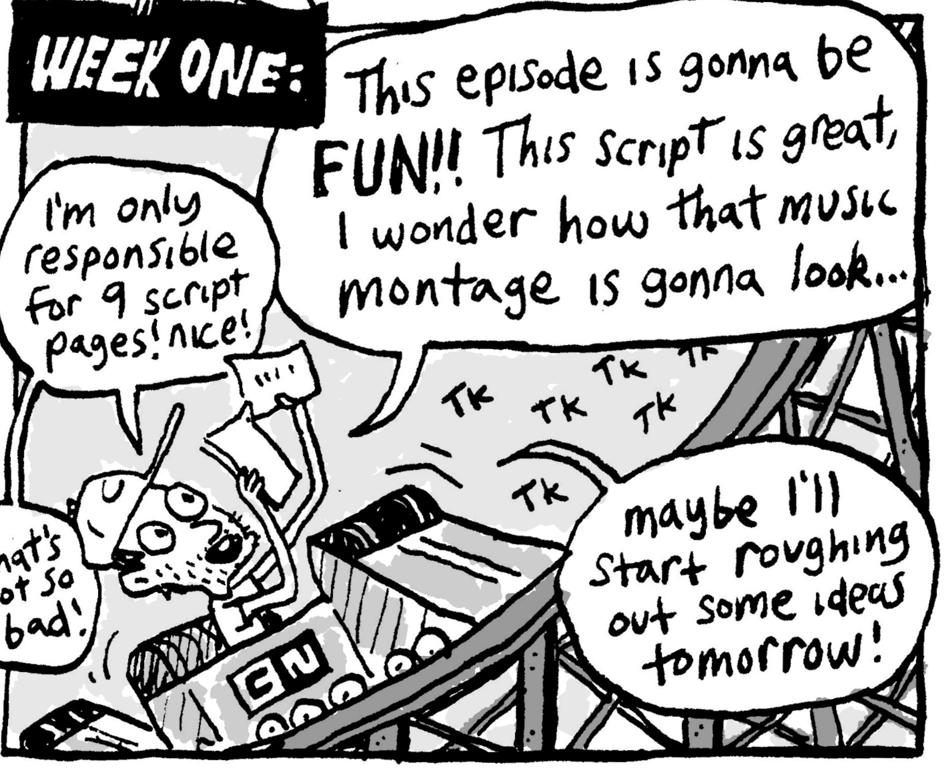

Yeah, I think you get it. it felt longer! Doubly so, you could say. it was enjoyable though, and I found that working alone better suited the WFH situation, as I no longer felt like I was half of a fractured partnership...
hi Natasha
hi Sam
about 10 miles apart IRL

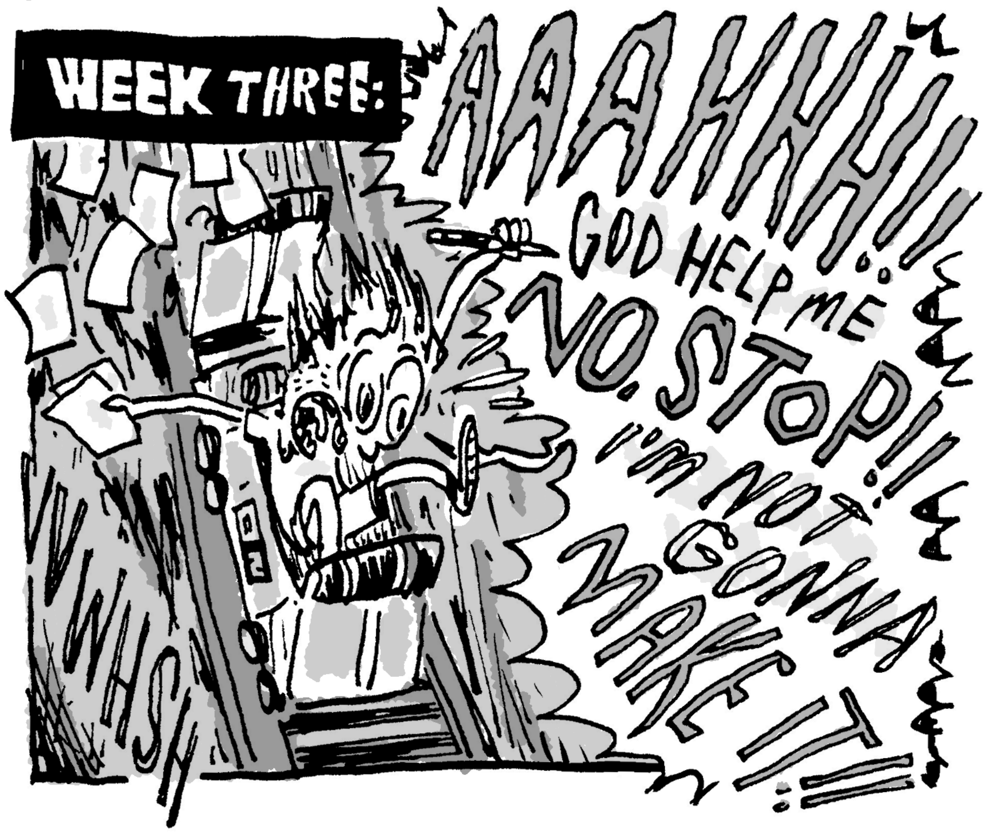

The episode I got just happened to be a super funny one too.
Jeez, I have to show them rotate the apartment building in song AND get attacked by eagles?
OOF, this one's nuts
YouTube CRANE videos
It was a good one to go out on! And I'm selfishly pumped to be the sole storyboarding credit for an EP.

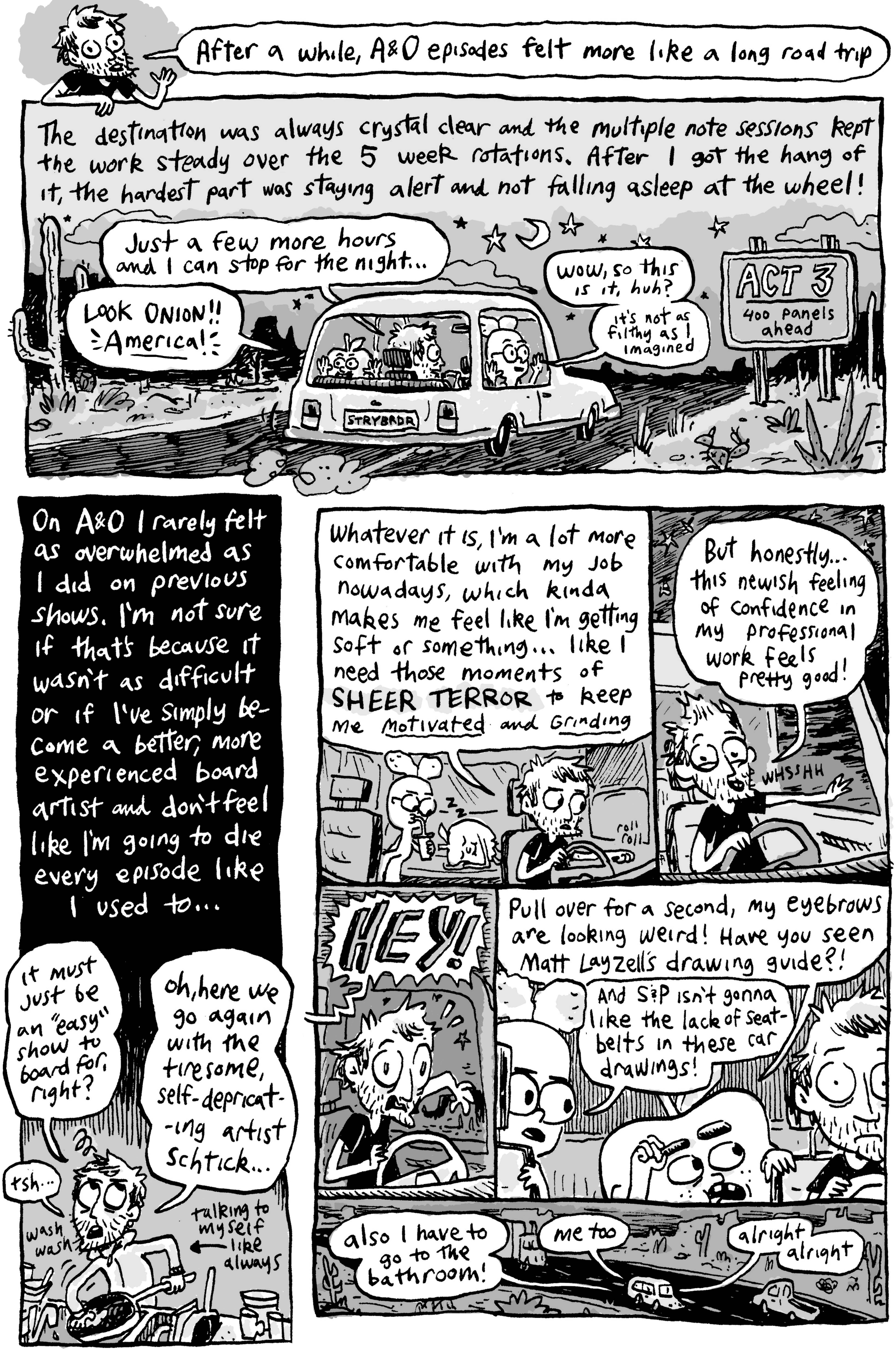

So THAT was my two year Apple & Onion experience
what a journey the show went on over that time


Other shows I've storyboarded for elicited the feeling of being on a roller coaster because the workload would vary so much week to week...
ooo... I sense some more visual story-telling!

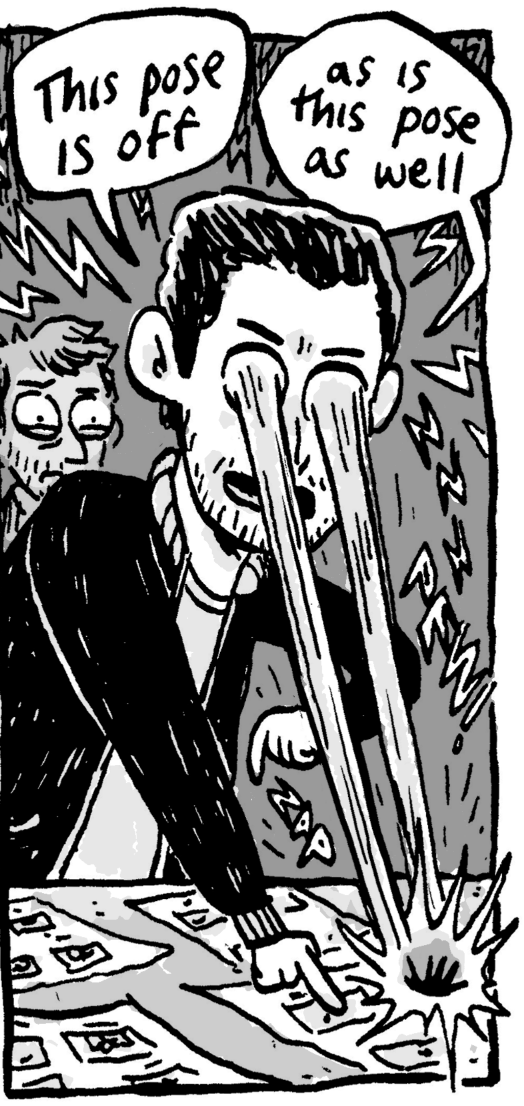

There were moments of CALM and moments of SHEER TERROR spaced out over each 5-week episode rotation


WEEK ONE:
This episode is gonna be FUN!! This script is great, I wonder how that music montage is gonna look...
I'm only responsible for 9 script pages! nice!
TK TK TK TK TK
That's not so bad!
maybe I'll start roughing out some ideas tomorrow!
CN

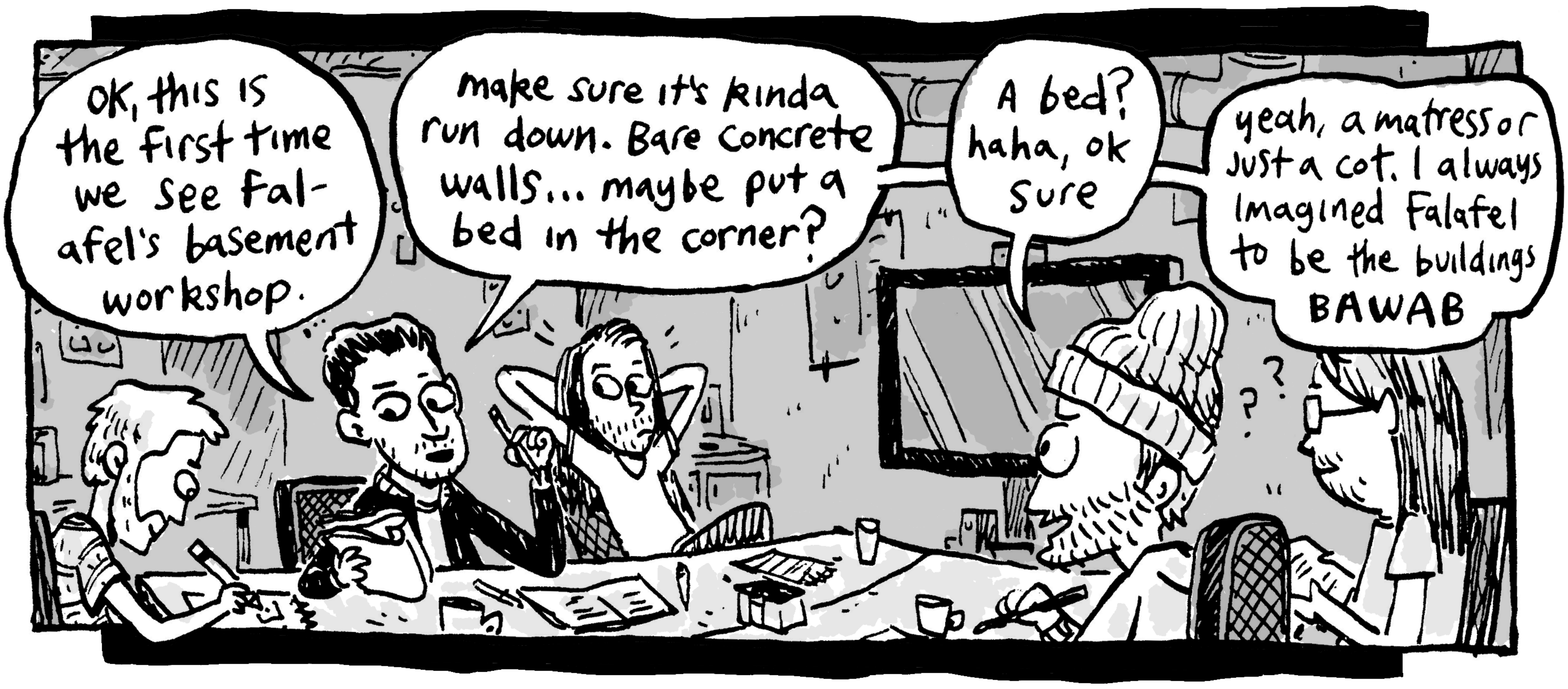

WEEK THREE:
AAAHHH!!
GOD HELP ME
NO. STOP!!
I'M NOT GONNA MAKE IT!!
WHSH

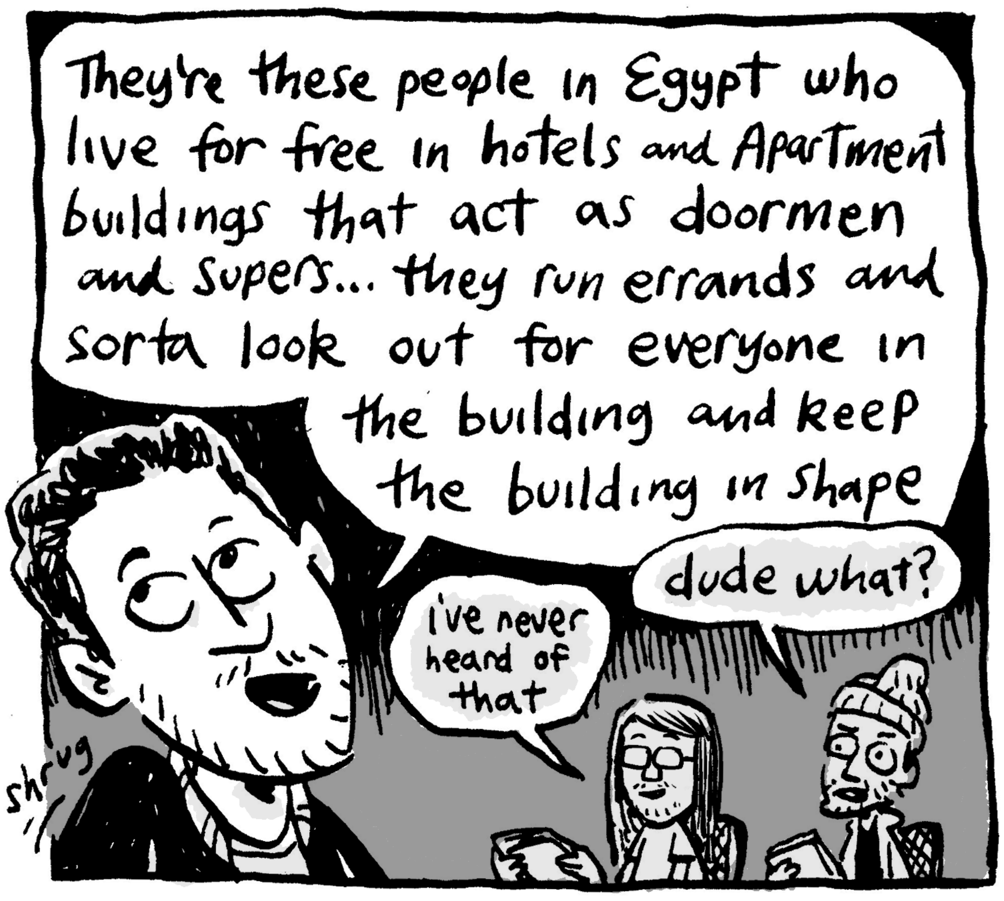

After a while, A&O episodes felt more like a long road trip
The destination was always crystal clear and the multiple note sessions kept the work steady over the 5 week rotations. After I got the hang of it, the hardest part was staying alert and not falling asleep at the wheel!
Just a few more hours and I can stop for the night...
LOOK ONION!! America!
wow, so this is it, huh?
it's not as filthy as I imagined
ACT 3
400 panels ahead
STRYBRDR
On A&O I rarely felt as overwhelmed as I did on previous shows. I'm not sure if that's because it wasn't as difficult or if I've simply become a better, more experienced board artist and don't feel like I'm going to die every episode like I used to...
Whatever it is, I'm a lot more comfortable with my job nowadays, which kinda makes me feel like I'm getting soft or something... like I need those moments of SHEER TERROR to keep me Motivated and Grinding
z z
roll roll
But honestly... this newish feeling of confidence in my professional work feels pretty good!
WHSSHH
it must just be an "easy" show to board for, right?
oh, here we go again with the tiresome, self-depricating artist schtick...
tsh...
wash wash
talking to myself like always
HEY!
Pull over for a second, my eyebrows are looking weird! Have you seen Matt Layzell's drawing guide?!
And S&P isn't gonna like the lack of seatbelts in these car drawings!
also I have to go to the bathroom!
me too
alright alright

One thing I've learned about dream Jobs is that they're still **JOBS**. There will always be ups and downs, but even when I was bogged down with notes, at the end of the day I still fully believed in what George was trying to do with the show and was pumped that I got to help him achieve his vision, because, to be clear, A&O is **GEORGE GENDI!** Sure, people gave suggestions and had their input here and there, but everyone staying true to his singular vision is what makes the show work so well.

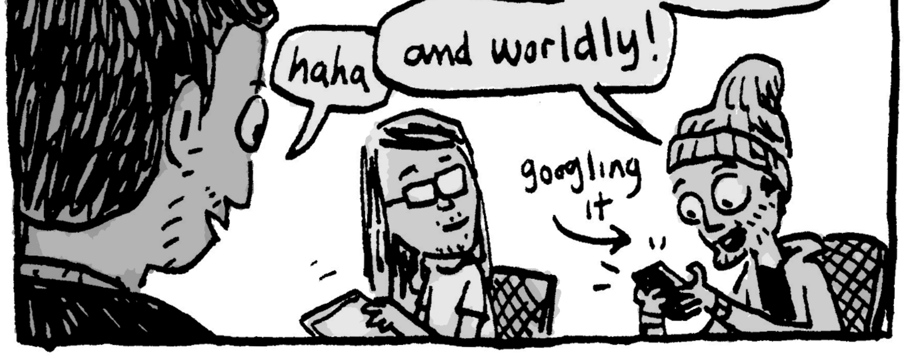

This pose is off
as is this pose as well
PEW!
ZAP

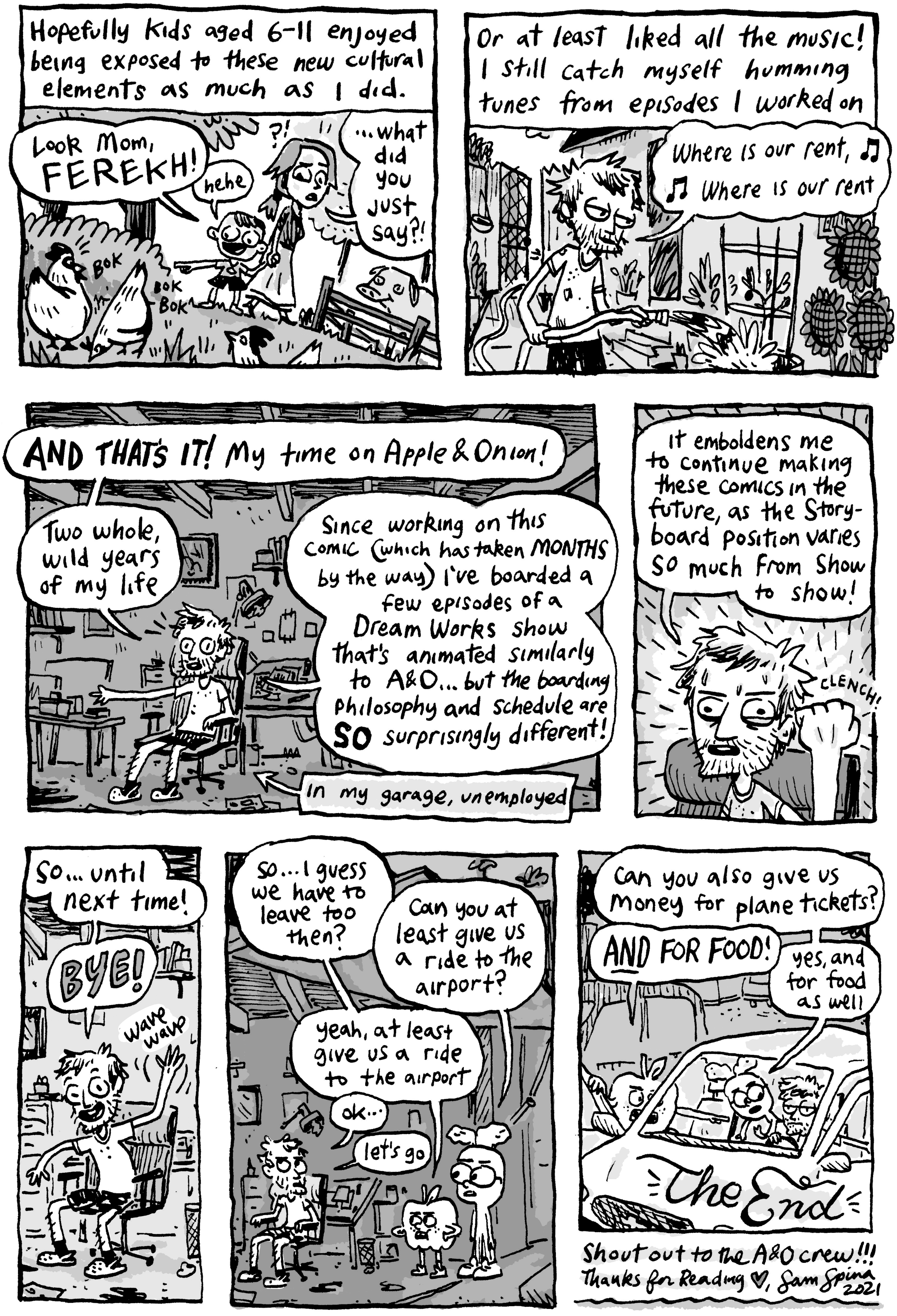
I still laugh at episodes I worked on because I'm genuinely still a fan! There's something so authentic and different about A&O that I can only describe as George, and I was still learning the rich backstory of the world + characters until the end of my time there. He'd make a small, offhand comment and I'd be reminded why I was so drawn to the show in the first place:


OK, this is the first time we see Falafel's basement workshop.
make sure it's kinda run down. Bare concrete walls... maybe put a bed in the corner?
A bed? haha, ok sure
yeah, a matress or just a cot. I always imagined Falafel to be the buildings BAWAB
?
?


They're these people in Egypt who live for free in hotels and Apartment buildings that act as doormen and supers... they run errands and sorta look out for everyone in the building and keep the building in shape
shrug
dude what?
I've never heard of that

There are so many tiny details in the show that you'd never notice but make the world feel so REAL. I was introduced to a lot of new cultural things through the show, be it Drum+Bass music, or new foods and slang I had never heard


"BAWAB"
Hm, that's so interesting!
and worldly!
haha
googling it


Hopefully kids aged 6-11 enjoyed being exposed to these new cultural elements as much as I did.
Look Mom, FEREKH!
hehe
?!
...what did you just say?!
BOK
BOK BOK
Or at least liked all the music! I still catch myself humming tunes from episodes I worked on
Where is our rent, ♫ ♫ Where is our rent
AND THAT'S IT! My time on Apple & Onion!
Two whole, wild years of my life
Since working on this comic (which has taken MONTHS by the way) I've boarded a few episodes of a Dream Works show that's animated similarly to A&O... but the boarding philosophy and schedule are SO surprisingly different!
In my garage, unemployed
It emboldens me to continue making these comics in the future, as the Storyboard position varies so much from show to show!
CLENCH!
So... until next time!
BYE!
wave wave
So... I guess we have to leave too then?
Can you at least give us a ride to the airport?
yeah, at least give us a ride to the airport
ok...
let's go
Can you also give us money for plane tickets?
AND FOR FOOD!
yes, and for food as well
The End
Shout out to the A&O crew!!!
Thanks for Reading ♥, Sam Spina 2021